

**S u b m i t  
P u b l i s h  
R e p e a t**

3rd Edition

**How to Publish  
Your Creative Writing  
in Literary Journals**

**Emily Harstone**

**A u t h o r s P u b l i s h**

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Authors Publish

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## Contents

Introduction.....	
Chapter 1: Why You Should Submit to Literary Journals.....	12
Chapter 2: How to Know Your Work is Ready to Submit.....	16
Chapter 3: The Basics of Submitting.....	22
Chapter 4: Six Tips for Submitting Your Work.....	26
Chapter 5: How to Submit Your Poetry for Publication.....	35
Chapter 6: Print Versus Online Journals.....	39
Chapter 7: 3 Things I Wish I Knew When I was First Submitting to Literary Journals.....	47
Chapter 8: How to Choose Where to Submit Your Work.....	52

Chapter 9: Good Literary Journals for Unpublished Writers.....	58
Chapter 10: Beginner Mistakes You can Avoid Making.....	62
Chapter 11: 30 Literary Journals that Pay Their Writers.....	69
Chapter 12: How to Find Literary Journals.....	82
Chapter 13: Paying to Submit.....	89
Chapter 14: Are Contests Worth the Fee?.....	93
Chapter 15: Anthologies – Another Publication Option.....	98
Chapter 16: Your Publishing Journey.....	103
Additional Resources.....	106
Glossary of Terms.....	110

## Introduction

In my experience, one of the best ways to become an established author is not by sending out a thousand query letters to agents and independent publishers. Instead, all of my professors in graduate school—including famous authors and poets—became established the same way: by publishing their work in literary journals.

A literary journal is a magazine that specializes in publishing works of literary merit. Some focus on a particular genre, like science fiction or crime writing, and others publish poetry, short stories, or flash fiction. Most are open to work of all kinds. Many are open to visual art, as well.

There are well over four thousand literary journals that are being published at this time. Some are printed publications that have one to twelve issues a year, others

are electronic publications. Many literary journals have both print and electronic versions. You can read most online journals for free, and many print journals have some sample pieces online—so you can get a better feel for what they publish.

Literary journals are published all around the world. There are respected journals published in English and based out of China, Spain, Germany, and almost any other country you can think of. Most journals are open to work by authors of any nationality.

Many literary journals are associated with an academic institution; most universities have at least one literary journal they produce. Many of these journals are well-respected. A quick way to spot a respected journal is to see when it started. Some journals have been around for well over a hundred years.

The majority of literary journals do not pay their writers. This is because many are registered as non-profits. It is



also because most online sites that publish literary journals have no ads, and thus no way to raise money since reading the journal is free.

Most literary journals are labors of love. Most nonacademic literary journals are edited by writers and the little funding they have generally comes directly out of the editor's pocket. Academic and established journals occasionally pay their editors, but the majority work for free, volunteering their time.

Some journals do pay writers—usually between ten and seventy-five dollars for poems and short stories. One of the following chapters features twenty journals that pay for work. In addition, most print magazines will give you a complimentary copy of the journal your work appeared in.

In this book, I will tell you why you should submit to literary journals. I will also provide advice on how to

find reputable journals, how to submit to them, and all the other practical details involved in submitting.

I have had my work published in over eighty reputable journals, as well as in many anthologies—some of which you can find in major bookstores. My poetry has been translated and published in over ten countries. I have also submitted for others professionally, placing many poems in prestigious journals for other people. I have done all of this in the last six years, and before that point I had never submitted to a literary journal.

The first university I was hired to teach at chose to employ me based on my publication record, as at that point I had no experience teaching at the university level. My publication history has also helped me find publishers for my longer manuscripts.

Submitting and being published by literary journals has helped improve my writing life in so many ways. That is one of the reasons I always encourage others to get their work out there.

It is important to note that all the information here is up to date at the time of publication. However, literary journals open and close or change their submission policies all the time, and technology also changes things, so make sure you verify information before submitting to any of the literary journals mentioned here.

## Chapter 1: Why You Should Submit to Literary Journals

When I was first starting out as a writer, I had no desire to submit to literary journals. I did not really understand what function they served, and I also didn't know how many there were out there; I thought they were a small niche marketplace.

By the time I entered graduate school I had been published a few times. Most of the works were in journals where I knew the editor and my work was solicited. This sounds nice and easy, but it is actually less rewarding if you know the person in charge of a publication. You always wonder if they chose your work just because they knew you.

When I entered graduate school I discovered very quickly why having your work published in literary

journals was important, regardless of what genre you wrote in. It was a stamp of approval, a way of making it clear that you were not a novice. It also made it easier to publish work in the future.

The first reason that you should start submitting to journals is that agents and publishers are more likely to sign a contract with an author who has a track record. I wrote many query letters before I submitted to journals, and my author's bio was always depressingly empty.

Once I published my work in literary journals, I started to get the attention of agents and publishers in a way I hadn't before.

Novice writers often complain to me about the expectations agents and publishers have for pre-existing publications. They tell me how complicated it makes getting the first book published. If they submitted short stories and excerpts of their novels to journals for

publication, they would have a solid stepping-stone toward getting their first book published.

The second reason you should submit to journals is that it can actually attract agents to you, or create a direct connection with a publisher. I know several authors who have received queries from agents after getting their piece published in a prestigious journal.

For example, Heather Smith Meloche's short story was published by the literary journal *Hunger Mountain*. An established agent read *Hunger Mountain* and signed Meloche. The agent ended up placing her debut novel *Ripple* at Penguin Putnam.

In addition, some journals—like *Tin House* and *Rust + Moth*—have a manuscript press attached to the journal. These manuscript presses almost always end up publishing authors whose work has appeared in their journal first.

The third reason that you should submit to journals is— as a general rule—the more you are published the easier it is to get more work published. Now when I submit my work to a respected journal I am no longer a poet without publications, but one who has appeared in many prestigious journals. I don't know if that alters the editor's opinion, but it probably encourages them to examine my work more closely. My work certainly receives more acceptance and appears in increasingly prestigious journals every year.

## Chapter 2: How to Know Your Work is Ready to Submit

Most writers struggle with the question of whether their work is ready to submit. They write something and for a brief moment feel it is the best thing they have ever written, then they change their minds. Even after many edits they are not always sure if something is ready. Perhaps you do not do this. If you are someone who is always sure that your work is ready for public consumption, you can skip this chapter.

I am a person who is prone to self-doubt and rarely do I feel like a piece is ever truly done. However, I have a set of guidelines that helps me know when I am ready to submit it. Having the following guidelines in place helps me always have something to submit.

### **Make Sure the Piece is at Least Two Weeks Old**

When I first write a poem or short piece of prose I tend not to have any idea if it is good or not. I lack



perspective on it. I like to take at least two weeks off before editing it. I think space and time really helps.

### **Get Another Person's Perspective**

This step is not always possible for me anymore; I write and submit so often that it is hard to find someone to give me detailed feedback for all my poems. At least the first few times you submit it is very important to have someone look over the work.

If you are just looking for typos anyone will do. However, if you want more feedback than that—and honestly you should probably have it—look for someone whose opinion you trust, or look for a writing group. Many independent bookstores and libraries house writing groups. Writing groups are wonderful because you get feedback from a variety of people all at one time.

### **Know Yourself**

Most people make the same minor grammatical or spelling errors over and over again. Most writers also tend to overuse a favorite word or phrase.

If you know what mistakes you tend to make in terms of spelling and grammar you can be on guard for these. For

example, I have a tendency to add more commas than are needed.

In terms of words, I sometimes use the word "lull" too often. If you know these sort of things about your own writing you can avoid falling into any obvious traps.

### **Avoid Beginner's Mistakes**

Beginning prose writers don't usually pay enough attention to paragraph breaks.

Poets who have yet to be published tend to fall into a punctuation trap. They may be inclined to use punctuation sporadically. It is best to use consistent punctuation when submitting a piece. Journals are more open to publishing work with established, predictable punctuation.

### **Edit**

Make sure that everything you submit to journals is edited. This may seem obvious but unfortunately it is not. Some people submit their first drafts to literary journals. This usually ends in rejection, but if the piece is accepted with mistakes and the mistakes are published

this reflects poorly on the author. Make sure to edit both for mistakes and for content.

### **Don't Procrastinate**

Sometimes it is hard to take that final step and submit, even if you have edited a piece a half-dozen times or more. Don't fall in to that trap, even if you are a perfectionist. Start submitting after you have completed the above steps. Even if it is not perfect in your own eyes, it could very well be for someone else. After all, writers are often their own worst critics.

### **Focus on the Beginning**

First impressions are important. If the first three paragraphs of your short story are bland, confusing, or riddled with errors, chances are that the editor or reader will either not read your entire piece, or not read it as carefully.

With a poem or a piece of flash fiction you only have a few lines to win over the reader or editor.

Make sure your beginning is memorable, polished, and clear. It greatly increases the odds that your piece will be published.

## **Make Sure You have a Memorable Title**

Many writers don't think the title of a short story or poem is very important, but it is the very first impression you make on many readers and editors. This is particularly important for poetry and flash because there are fewer words involved in both these forms of writing, so more attention is placed on every word.

When I was reading for a literary journal, three people coincidentally submitted poems titled "Tabula Rasa," which means a clean slate. As interesting as that phrase is, the whole group of readers passed on all three poems, partially because the title in every case felt like an easy choice and did not actually suit the poem. It felt so generic. Also, while we were discussing all three poems it was very hard to distinguish one from the other, without physically pointing.

A memorable title can help intrigue an editor. It can also help them remember your piece and find it again in the pile of submissions.



## Chapter 3: The Basics of Submitting

It is very easy to submit your work to literary journals. In the past, you had to submit work through the mail with a self-addressed stamped envelope (SASE) and it could take months or even years to hear back from the journal. Submitting through the mail still exists but less than 10 percent of literary journals require you to do so.

Now the world is very different. Turnaround times are much faster. Trees are being saved. Some literary journals still require postal submissions, but most accept electronic submissions.

There are two primary ways to submit electronically. The first is through email. This used to be the most common way to submit. You can use your existing email address or create an account that you use exclusively for submitting—whichever is your personal preference. It is good to figure out which works better for you.

When you submit via email, some journals prefer the work to be attached and others prefer the work to be in the body of the email. Either way it is easy to submit via email, and rather fast.

Submission managers, largely run by third party services, are becoming even more common. Submission managers are easy to use sites that organize the information for the editors on the other side.

By far the most popular submission manager is Submittable (formerly submishmash). Submittable charges the journals that use it, but not the submitting writers. It is easy and free to set up an account. You can even connect it to a pre-existing Facebook account.

Submittable saves your address and contact information, and makes it easy to insert your cover letter and upload your work. It also allows for easy withdrawals of work from some journals if your piece is accepted elsewhere.

The downside to Submittable is that while it is free for writers to use, the company that runs it charges literary journals. Because of this many journals have started to charge submission fees (a topic I have devoted an entire chapter to), and Submittable makes it very easy for journals to charge submitters a fee.

There are other smaller submission managers, but most you have to sign up for on an individual basis. All of them are easy to use.

Most journals ask for a cover letter, a brief biographical statement, and the work itself. I go into the details of the cover letter and the biographical statement in the next chapter.

It is important to note that your cover letter should be brief and to the point. It should not be longer than three sentences in length, unless the journal specifically requests additional information.

Most biographical statements should be fifty words in length or less.



All journals have specific guidelines; some are rather detailed in terms of formatting, inclusion of contact information in a particular way, etc.

However, most guidelines are simple and easy to follow.

Always makes sure you read the submission guidelines before you submit. When you are submitting via email, most journals have a specific subject line format they want you to use to make sure that your work is not filtered out of their inbox.

Once you have submitted your work, all you have to do is update your submission tracker (more on that in the next chapter). Submitting is very easy and once you have submitted a few times and know how to find good journals it can be easy to submit to up to seven journals in one hour.

## Chapter 4: Six Tips for Submitting

### Your Work

If you have never sent your creative writing out to a literary journal before, the experience can be intimidating. Many productive writers try to avoid submitting; however, there is no real way around it if you want to get your work out into the world.

This chapter contains six tips for submitting your work. Even if you have previously sent out work before you may still find them helpful. I have been submitting for six years now. After submitting for so long, these tips are still a touchstone for me. They always help me keep on track.

**My first tip is to set a submission goal for yourself.**

Set it somewhere that seems reasonable to you: perhaps five submissions to different magazines per month. I

often exceed my per month goal, because once I reach that point, I want the feeling of accomplishment to linger. Soon those submissions will really start to add up.

The more experience you have submitting, the faster you will get; as you progress it becomes easier to submit your work. I often have forty submissions out at a time. Three of the most respected authors I know suggested that this was one of the ways that they became successful. I don't know why forty is the magic number, but it seems to be the case.

**My second tip is to create submission packets.** If you are a short story writer you don't need to do this, since most journals only consider one short story at a time. However, if you are a poet, journals generally want between three to five of your poems to consider at a time. I have five packets that each contain between four to five poems. I always reserve two packets to submit to places that do not accept simultaneous submissions. The rest I submit to multiple places.

**My third tip is to keep track of what you submit and where you submit it.** I keep a Word document that keeps track of which journals I have submitted to, what poems I have submitted to them, and when I submitted these poems. I write down which poems have been accepted and where. I document which journals have rejected certain poems. I update this "submission tracker" every time I submit, otherwise I might submit the same poems to the same journal twice, or submit poems that have been accepted elsewhere, or any similar minor disaster. Make sure you regularly update this document—otherwise it will get out of control. I have included a sample of a very small submission tracker.

***Sample Submission Tracker:***

**Pending:**

The New Yorker, Submitted September 28th, The Living (short story).

Perception, Submitted September 28th, My Teeth, Superman, Pumpkin Bread (poems).

**Acceptances:**

Waterhouse, Submitted January 14th, 2013. Ham, Companion, Uma Thurman (poems).

**Accepted Companions:**

Block Review, Submitted January 25th 2013, Ready (short story).

**Rejections:**

Three Penny Review, Submitted January 7, 2012. Timer (short story).

Apple Journal, submitted January 7, 2013. Pancakes for Dinner (short story).

**My fourth tip is to create a couple of biographical statements.** When you read submission guidelines—which vary from site to site—almost all of them will require that you include a brief biographical statement and a cover letter. Most submission guidelines are very similar, so as long as you have a biographical statement and a cover letter on standby it should take you very little time to submit.

One of your biographical statements should be under fifty words and the other should be under one hundred words in length. Once your work has been published in various literary journals you should include some of the most recent or prestigious journals in your biographical statement. However, you should not include all of them; that would just be overwhelming and it would come off as unprofessional. Below are examples of biographical statements of less than fifty words, one contains journal names, one does not.

***Sample Bio 1:***

Maria Smith resides in the rural Pacific Northwest. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in numerous places, including: *Tin House*, *The Liner*, and *Echolocation*, and the anthology *Tidelines*. Her second chapbook *Pancakes for Dinner* is forthcoming in 2014 from Hawthorne Press.

***Sample Bio 2:***

Joshua Thomas is a poet, editor, and recovering New Yorker who now lives in Idaho. Joshua once wrote a sonnet every hour for twenty-four hours straight. He loves to hike, cook, and read.

**My fifth tip is to create a standard cover letter for all the journals that you are submitting to.** A cover letter should be as simple as possible; an editor does not have a lot of time and does not want to be bogged down by the details. If I am submitting to a journal I particularly like, I will include a note about why I like it. Sometimes journals will request that I include additional information such as titles and word count in my cover letter and I will cut and paste that information in. Otherwise, my cover letter is almost identical to the sample letter.

***Sample Cover Letter:***

Dear Editors,

The following poems are for your consideration.

Thank you for your time,

Katharine Hathaway

**My sixth tip is to always read the submission guidelines.** Now this might seem like common sense but many writers figure if they have read one submission guideline they have read them all. This is not the case. For many literary journals up to 25 percent of work is rejected because it is not what they publish, and not due to stylistic preferences.

For example, a literary journal that explicitly states they do not accept genre work will receive a fair amount of science fiction short stories. Or a journal that publishes poetry may receive hundreds of short story submissions a month.

Krishan Copeland, the editor of *Neon*, phrased it well when he said, “*Neon* publishes dark slipstream and magical realist fiction and poetry. A six-hundred page hard-boiled noir detective novel isn’t likely to find a place in its pages. Neither is a feature-length



documentary film, or any number of hobby articles or fashion pieces. And yet these are all things that I've been offered in the past year."

You can read Krishan Copeland's full article "6 Cover Letter Mistakes That Can Ruin The Chance of Publication" [here](#).

Also, many people who don't read the submission guidelines will end up being automatically rejected, either by a filter on the email the editor has set up, or by the editor themselves because the submitter has not followed one guideline or another.

For example, if the journal's guidelines say they only accept submissions where the work is cut and pasted into the body of the email and you send that work as an attachment, they will likely reject your work without ever reading it. That might sound callous, but many editors read hundreds of submissions every month, and they set up their

submission guidelines a certain way for a reason. So please follow them as much as possible.

## Chapter 5: How to Submit Your Poetry for Publication

If you're ready to get your poetry published in literary journals, then you're going to need to go through the process of submitting your work. This chapter will guide you through the most important step in the process so that you can start submitting your work, and get published.

That step is putting together your submission so that it has the best chance of getting the editor's attention, and being accepted for publication.

When you submit short stories or nonfiction to a journal it can be very straightforward: You just choose one well-edited story that you wrote and submit it. With poetry, things are a little tougher because you have to choose

three to five poems to submit. There are several things you have to do before you submit them.

The first step is that you have to choose three to five poems that go together. Some journals accept six and some only accept three. I usually gather the poems in groups of three to five, because accepting six is rare and it's easy to shave a packet of five poems down to three for one journal.

I call each grouping of three to five poems a "submission packet." I usually have between five to seven submission packets at one time, and each packet contains three to five poems. I submit each of these packets to more than one place at a time, but usually to no more than five places. That way if the poems get accepted, I can easily withdraw them from consideration at the other publications.

When choosing which poems to place in which submission packet, I consider the tone. For example, say

I have a number of darkly comic poems; I may group these together in a submission packet.

However, there should be variation in each submission packet. Don't make the mistake of grouping poems that all have the same tone, theme, and subject matter. The editor who reads these poems only gets one impression of your work, and if it doesn't match with what they are looking for, too bad for you.

Having variation in your packet significantly increases the likelihood of the editor connecting with one of your poems. Still, think about order and sense of narration as well; one poem should not contradict or clash with the next. After you have chosen a group of poems, go over them one last time, reviewing for any obvious mistakes or changes in spacing during the rearranging process.

Some poets often have an urge to overexplain the context of their poems in the cover letter when they submit their work to a journal. Restrain yourself from doing that.

Most editors won't publish work unless the context is made clear within the poems themselves.

Once you have your submission packets ready, your poems should be ready to submit to any journal! Don't edit or reorder the packets for every journal, just make sure that the way your poems are formatted fits the journals' guidelines.

Some journals require your name and contact information to be on every page. Other journals prohibit this and will discard any packet that includes the author's name or personal information. Make sure your packet is formatted correctly for the specific journal.

Once you have a couple of submission packets it is easy to submit your work. Often, it will take me no longer than ten minutes to submit my poems to a journal I am interested in.

## Chapter 6: Print Versus Online

### Journals

Print journals have been around for a very long time; you can submit to journals that are going into their sixth decade, and have published many famous poets, both dead and alive. Online journals are clearly a newer phenomenon.

There are advantages and disadvantages that are associated with both forms of publishing. Below I will offer my personal opinion.

#### Print Journals

The advantage to being published in print journals is that they are generally more established, and they can really help your overall reputation as a writer.

The most established and respected journals are mostly print. When the first edition of this book was published around three years ago, all but one of the most respected journals were in print; that is no longer the case. So over time this will probably continue to shift.

With print publication you often receive a free contributor's copy, so you get to see your work in print. Usually these print journals are well bound with a nice cover. If a journal is made well, receiving it in the mail is a thoroughly wonderful experience. It can go on a shelf with all your other printed work, giving you an occasional ego boost. Print journals are also more likely to pay, although they do this mostly through free contributor copies or subscriptions to the journal.

The disadvantage to print journals is that less people read your work. However, this is more a theory than something I can concretely prove. Some journals do have a very large circulation and a large group of consistent readers, but most do not. Many print journals



cite rising costs and a decreasing list of subscribers as the reasons they now charge writers to submit their work. Also, many times the only place you can buy the literary journal or subscribe is through the journal's website, which means few people are just going to stumble across it.

People generally seem more open to reading poems for free online than seeking them out in print or subscribing to journals. In part this is because of the cost, but the hassle of filling out payment information every single time you subscribe to a new journal is a factor, too. All the feedback I have received from readers that I didn't know was regarding poems that were published online.

Once *The New Yorker*—a magazine with an excellent circulation, who pays their poets very well—published a poem I loved by a new author. It was only in their print magazine, and they did not post it online. I loved the poem so much that a month later I tracked the author

down by Googling him and sent him an email thanking him for the poem. He told me that I was the only stranger to contact him after the publication of this poem.

Another mark against print journals is that sometimes you have to pay in order to read a copy of the print journal that your work is in, and sometimes there is not even a discount for contributors. I think it is wrong that the writer should have to pay to see their own work in print.

A very rare but very real issue with print journals is that occasionally the magazine has advertisements in the journal. Now, if the advertisement is just in the back or front of the literary journal, that is fine; I have no problem with it. Occasionally they will place the advertisements on the same pages as the printed work.

Once a serious poem of mine was published with an advertisement for a sexual councilor printed on the same page, right after the poem ended.

Print journals often have slow response times. Sometimes it will take over a year to hear if your work has been accepted or rejected. It can also take up to a year after that for the journal to be printed.

Additionally, as I touched on before, print journals are more likely to charge readers a fee in order to consider their work. I will talk more about reading fees in Chapter 13.

### Online Journals

There are many advantages of online journals. Sometimes they have a large established group of readers who read the journal regularly. Since works don't tend to be hidden behind a pay wall, there are a lot of great poems out there that people can access for free. It is also easy to share poems that are published online with

friends and acquaintances, because you can link to it through Facebook, Twitter, or email.

Online journals can have audio and visual options that are not as easy for print journals to offer. They also tend to respond to your submission a lot faster, and often it is posted online within months. You don't have to wait years to see your work out in the world.

Of course, publishing in online journals also has its disadvantages. Most online journals are not taken as seriously as print journals; however, this is changing. Even within the last two years, online journals have become more respected. This is partially due to the fact that they tend to have a larger and more vocal group of readers.

Once a piece is printed online you have fewer options open to you in terms of getting a journal to reprint it. Also, you don't get to feel the joy of having a journal

arrive free in the mail with your poem in it. Instead, there is a link to your work that arrives in your inbox.

One issue is that some online journals—although it is rather uncommon—do charge a fee for readers to see your work or to read the issue as a whole. It is becoming more common for online journals to have submission fees, as well. This is a new development over the last few years, but it appears to be spreading at a rapid rate.

One of the biggest issues with online journals is that it is rather easy to start one. You could start one on a blog, or start one on a whim. I once knew an editor who started a journal when they were drunk. The work of maintaining one can be rather time consuming, so it is not uncommon for an online journal to only last a few years.

Be aware that once you have given the journal your first publication rights you can never get them back, even if they have long ago gone under (unless they never managed to publish your piece at all).

I have made some pretty general statements here, because when you go too far into the specifics there are often exceptions.

I have submitted my work extensively to both online and print journals. For a while I only submitted to print journals, and however rewarding that was, after a while I missed the accessibility and visibility of online publications. So now I am once again submitting to both.

## **Chapter 7: 3 Things I Wish I Knew When I was First Submitting to Literary Journals**

When I first submitted to literary journals, I spent fifteen minutes or more on their websites tracking down any scrap or clue that might help my work be accepted. I read their guidelines multiple times. Every time I received a rejection I read a lot into it.

Now, many years and at least a thousand submissions later, I have learned so much, and have become an efficient submitter of my work. More of my work is published each year. The first year I submitted I had three publications, this year I have had well over twenty publications. The following are things I wish I knew when I began.

## **1. What a journal says they are looking for and what they are actually looking for are not the same thing.**

Most journals have a statement on their submission page about what they are looking for and what you should submit. Some of these things are clear and true. If they say they are looking for poetry and flash fiction under 1,000 words in length, they most certainly mean it. Do not submit a 2,000 word story. Also, if they say they are looking only for works of science fiction or some other genre, only submit works from that genre to them.

Many journals list things that are not helpful and can be misleading and waste your time if you focus on them too much. For example, a lot of journals indicate they are looking for experimental work; few define what they mean by that. By reading these same journals, I have concluded that experimental work



appears to cover everything from a traditional haiku to a list of unrelated words.

I spent a lot of time when I was first submitting trying to match a journal's style with my submission. I know now that this was a waste of time, as what they said they wanted and what they actually wanted were two different things.

Another example is that most journals ask for you to only submit your best work. I have no clue what they mean by that. As far as I can tell, it usually means the journal is new and unestablished or the editors have not yet figured out what they are looking for. As a general rule I do not submit my "best work" to these journals.

Focus on what the journal is looking for in terms of concrete statements about length and genre, and ignore the other information for the most part.

## **2. Every journal wants you to buy a copy before submitting.**

Many literary journals need to sell copies to survive. Almost every single print journal I know and a lot of electronic journals try to encourage submitters to buy a copy of their journal before submitting. This is time consuming and expensive. It is not feasible and it is not advisable.

If you like the look of a journal and it is really up your alley, you should subscribe because you want to; not just to get a good feeling for the journal, but because you are interested in the work they are publishing and you want to support them.

If you want to get a feeling for the work they have published, many do have a few poems and short stories published online. It is worth spending a couple minutes to read one or two of these.

## **3. Don't take rejection seriously.**

Do not take rejection seriously. Your work can be rejected for any number of arbitrary or legitimate reasons. If you take each rejection seriously, that will consume a lot of mental energy.

Instead, focus on submitting a lot. There are so many good journals out there. Take the opportunity the numbers offer. Also, it is good to keep in mind that just because a journal rejects a piece of yours once, that does not mean they are not open to later submissions. Often pieces of mine have been accepted by a journal that previously rejected an earlier piece.

## Chapter 8: How to Choose Where to Submit Your Work

Choosing where to submit is one of the trickiest propositions as a writer. I know some people who submit their work to a great variety of publications, others who only submit to the most prestigious, and some who only submit to journals they like. Really, where you submit is up to you.

However, there are good guidelines to keep in mind when submitting. You can personalize these as much as you like, and they can change from time to time; mine are constantly in flux. Most of the time when I submit, I do so based on one of the following factors:

### Do They Accept Electronic Submissions?

I am not much of a letter writer, and I hate dealing with stamps. So I generally just submit to journals that accept

submissions electronically. I can be much more efficient this way, and I can submit to five journals in an hour if I try. I also don't have to bother with including self-addressed stamped envelopes (SASE) in order to get feedback.

The times I submitted by mail I noticed several differences. Response times seemed to be much slower: It took most journals around six months to send me a response, either by letter or email. In addition, there were a lot more journals overall that never responded: they just never got back to me about my work, even though I included an SASE.

The upside to submitting by mail is that most journals—even established respected journals—which only accept submissions by mail generally have a much higher acceptance rate, because fewer people submit this way. So that is worth keeping in mind.

## Is the Journal Respected?

Not all journals have a great reputation. Some journals accept too much work, others don't seem to have any quality control, while others treat their writers poorly or don't try to promote their journals at all. Some just want you to pay for a print edition, and others will reflect badly on you if they appear in your biographical statement.

The more you submit the easier it will be to tell if a journal has a good reputation or not. There are several obvious signs that will help you differentiate.

- The first sign is acceptance rate (more on that later).
  - The second is reviews.
  - The third is how long it has been around.
  - The fourth is word of mouth.
  - The fifth is who they have previously published.
- If a lot of the writers they have previously

published have names you know, that journal most likely has an excellent reputation.

I submit to many respected journals, but I also submit to journals that aren't particularly well known. However, I would never submit to a journal with a bad reputation.

### **How Much Work Does the Journal Accept?**

Some journals accept almost everything that is submitted to them, while others accept less than one out of every one hundred pieces they receive.

There are two websites that monitor acceptance rates. One is Duotrope and the other is The (Submission) Grinder. They base these acceptance rates on data that submitters give them. Links to both websites are in the additional resources section of this book. I go into more detail about the services both websites provide in Chapter 12.

Most people who use Duotrope and The (Submission) Grinder report every time a piece of work has been accepted or rejected. Because so many thousands of writers use these sites there is a fair amount of data to work with. Not every journal has acceptance rates listed, but all of the popular ones do.

Some journals are notoriously hard to get into, such as: *Tin House*, *The New Yorker*, *AGNI*, *Glimmer Train*, *The Black Warrior Review*, *Fence*, *Gulf Stream*, and *The Paris Review*. Other journals are notoriously easy to get into: *Danse Macabre*, *Writers Haven*, *Leaves of Ink*, *Dead Snakes*, *Linguistic Erosion*, and *The Story Shack*. Most journals fall into the middle, accepting between 5 percent and 30 percent of the work they receive. So keep that in mind when submitting.

## Do You Like the Journal?

If you visit the website of an electronic journal and are overwhelmed by the bad graphics and the clunky interface, don't submit. You don't want your work to be



associated with something you aesthetically dislike or find frustrating. The same should be true for print journals.

Whenever you visit a website or browse a magazine, evaluate it; not just in terms of visual aesthetics but also the writing it contains. You don't have to like everything a journal publishes, but you should at least like one of the poems, or one of the stories, before submitting. If it's a print journal and they require you to buy a copy to read the contents, then you have fewer options.

I often submit to brand new journals, ones that have never published a single issue, and some of these journals have been wonderful. Most of the new journals I submitted to have gone on to have great reputations. I took a chance on them, but I never regretted it. Often I will submit to these journals based entirely on website aesthetics. This might sound shallow, but so far it has been a very good strategy.

## Chapter 9: Good Literary Journals for Unpublished Writers

There are not any hard or fast rules on where you should submit when you are first starting out. Although certain journals make it clear in their guidelines that they prefer submissions from unpublished writers, this is a rare request. Most journals are happy to publish a writer for the first time but they are not overtly trying to do so.

Every writer has different goals and ambitions. Some just want to publish their work. They want to get it out into the world and they don't care how prestigious the journal is or how many authors they accept. Other authors are only interested in publishers that publish genre. Some new writers just want personal feedback and others want a quick response time.

I really think you can submit your work to any journal that you want. But I do think that it is good to know what you are getting into. Below I have listed some good places to get started if you are looking for journals that accept most of what they receive, journals with good reputations, and journals that respond quickly to submissions.

### **Journals That Accept Most of What They Receive:**

Some journals accept over half of what they receive. Some of the journals that are best known for being an easy place to get your work published include [Eskimo Pie](#), [Plum Tree Tavern](#), [Down In the Dirt](#), [Pidgeon Holes](#) and [Story Shack Magazine](#). Acceptance rates change all the time, so realize that over time these journals may become harder to get into. At the time of this publication they all had an over 30 percent acceptance rate.

These are not the only publishers that are easy to get into, but they are a good place to start if your sole goal is to get published in a literary journal.

### **Journals That have Good Reputations:**

Most journals we review at Authors Publish have good reputations. But here are some good journals to submit to that are both highly competitive and prestigious. For fiction some of the best places to submit include [Glimmer Train](#), [The Threepenny Review](#), [Tin House](#), and [Black Clock](#). For poetry some of the best places to submit include [BarrelHouse](#), [Poetry](#), [Jubilat](#) and [Blackbird](#).

There are a lot of literary journals out there that are very respected. The more you read, submit, and talk to other writers about where they are submitting the more journals you will learn about.

### **Journals with Fast Response Times:**

It is good to start out by submitting your work to journals that have fast response times. It is rewarding to hear back from journals within a month, rather than a year later, when you have forgotten all about them. Some of the journals that have consistently fast response times and regularly respond within a month (or less) include, [Thrush](#), [Word Riot](#), [Radar Poetry](#), and [Bop Dead City](#).

## Chapter 10: Beginner Mistakes You can Avoid Making

The following mistakes are not all my own. As an editor, I have seen all of these mistakes among incoming submissions. Many of the mistakes listed below you would most likely not make, but are good to keep in mind, just in case. Some of these mistakes involve specific aspects of literary journal culture and can be easy to make as a new submitter.

The first mistake is to have overly long cover letters. I already gave you a sample letter, however I really want to stress this point. When I was an editor I received several actual job cover letters with poetry submissions. This information was not needed and not read, but made it clear that those submissions were from people who did not know how the system worked.

Another common mistake and an easy one to make is to not submit your work to a journal that requests to see more of your work. If editors really like your work but are not sure about the particular poems or versions of the writing you sent in, they may send you a rejection letter requesting to see more work or to see a different edit of the submitted work. Take these personal requests very seriously. Editors do not send them out casually. You should make sure to submit your work to this journal again.

One of the biggest mistakes new submitters make is that after their work is accepted by a literary journal they continue to post that accepted work online. This is considered to be impolite and also violates the informal code of conduct or the formal contract many journals have.

Once your work has been published by the journal, the rights to the poem or story returns to you, sometimes immediately and sometimes six months

later. At that time, you can decide if you should or should not self-publish it on your website or submit it to journals that accept reprints. Even if you just publish it on your website, remember to give credit to the journal that originally published it.

Always remember to be patient. Most of these literary journals are run by volunteers who are unpaid and do this in their spare time. Querying an editor a couple times a month, or even a year, to find out if your work has been accepted is most likely not going to help the situation.

One of the mistakes I myself have made was to assume something about the size of the journal. Once, after my work was accepted I wrote the editor back; we had a mutual friend in common and I mentioned her in my reply. Unfortunately, that editor never saw my email. Another editor had taken their place. The awkward reply I received from the



new editor, a complete stranger, was not an experience worth repeating.

Make sure that you never ignore any clear guidelines set out by the journal. If they tell you to format your work a particular way, do it. They probably have a good legitimate reason. Many journals receive so many submissions every month that it is hard to keep track of everything properly unless these guidelines are followed. They have every right to ignore your work, and many do so if you do not follow their guidelines.

If you submit your work simultaneously to more than one journal at a time, you have to make sure to go about it in the correct manner. Most contemporary journals in the United States are open to simultaneous submissions. If a press does not mention simultaneous submissions, it is safe to assume that they accept them. If a journal makes a direct statement that they do not accept

simultaneously submitted work, it is up to your conscience whether you submit or not. Most of the established authors I know do anyway.

The most important thing that you can do is report when your work is accepted elsewhere. Say a journal accepts one of your poems or a short story that you have submitted to ten other places. You then have to write those ten other places to withdraw the piece.

If you submitted through the manager Submittable you can withdraw the piece using the same system. It is very easy to do, although a little time consuming. If you submitted more than one piece and only one was accepted by another journal, you can tell the other publications of this situation. This is the right thing to do, and should ensure that you are on good terms with the editors whose magazines you submit to. It is the responsible way to simultaneously submit.

Some journals have a huge staff of readers and editors, others are just one person. Some journals, particularly ones associated with academic journals, have a high staff turnover rate, with the editors and readers changing every semester or year. Other journals have had the same main editors for over two decades. It is always safest to assume that the editorial staff do not know who you are, even if you have been published by that journal before.

The most important point I can make is this last one: You should always be polite. Since you never know who will be receiving your work, who will be reading it, or how many people will be reading it, you should always be polite.

The literary community is a small one, and the more you submit to journals the more you will realize that everyone knows someone who is connected to you or connects deeper into the community. Comments

written in jest in emails can easily be misconstrued, so be careful with that.

It is better to be boring and polite than to accidentally insult someone. Of course this works both ways. Journals that have not handled work well or have had rude editors tend to be known and avoided by the writing community at large.

## Chapter 11: 30 Literary Journals that Pay Their Writers

*“It is a sad fact about our culture that a poet can earn much more money writing or talking about his art than he can by practicing it.” – W.H. Auden*

As someone who makes their living writing about writing and publishing, I can attest to how truthful Auden’s quote is. It is hard making a living as a writer, but it is even harder making a living as a poet or an author of short fiction.

Many literary journals do not pay their writers. This is because most are passion projects, not-for-profit, or are run by an individual or a small group of people who love to write and read but do not necessarily have a lot of money. Many of these journals are run by schools with underfunded English departments. I would say that over

seventy five percent of literary journals do not pay their writers. I have no problem with that. But occasionally, it is nice to be paid.

Here are 30 literary journals that pay their authors. They may not be the most prestigious journals (although some of them are), they are not all open to submissions right now, but all of them do pay. Some pay well and others pay a token amount.

### **1. The Threepenny Review**

We have reviewed this literary journal before, so you can learn more of the details by reading that review [here](#). The Threepenny Review is one of the most respected print journals out there and they also pay their writers \$200 per poem or \$400 per short story. You can visit their website [here](#). They are primarily interested in short stories and poems.

### **2. Escape Pod**

Escape Pod publishes all of its stories in audio and text formats. They are a science fiction market but as they say in their submission guidelines “our mandate is fun.” They allow some flexibility to exist within the genre and they have published the occasional steampunk or superhero tale. But they are not interested in fantasy, magic realism, or stories that contain more than a tinge of horror. They pay 100 dollars for reprints and more for original work. Read our full review [here](#).

### **3. Flash Fiction Online**

Flash Fiction Online is an electronic journal that accepts very few of the flash fiction pieces that they receive. They are only interested in publishing short stories that are between 500 and 1000 words in length. They pay 60 dollars per story. They are open to stories of any genre but have very specific guidelines that you can read on their website [here](#).

### **4. Page & Spine**

You can read our full review of Page & Spine [here](#). They are a fairly new market that accepts a wide range of work, from the very good to the unfinished. They have a fairly high acceptance rate. Page & Spine pays its authors \$20 per short story or longer poem. They are primarily interested in short stories and poems. You can visit their website [here](#).

### **5. Clarksworld**

*Clarkesworld Magazine* is a Hugo and World Fantasy Award-winning science fiction and fantasy magazine that publishes short stories, interviews, articles and audio fiction on a monthly basis. They pay very well. Read our full review [here](#).

### **6. Glimmer Train**

Glimmer Train exclusivity publishes fiction. Out of the 100 short stories listed in the recent edition of Best American Short Stories, 10 first appeared in Glimmer Train Stories, more than in any other publication. Glimmer Train accepts less than 1 percent of the work



submitted to them. They pay over 5 cents a word. If you are interested in submitting to Glimmer Train please visit their website [here](#).

### **7. The Malahat Review**

The Malahat Review is an established and respected print magazine based out of Canada. They purchase first world serial rights and, upon acceptance, pay \$40 CAD per published page, plus a one-year subscription.

Copyright reverts to the author upon publication. To learn more visit their website [here](#).

### **8. Shimmer**

Shimmer publishes speculative fiction. We have reviewed them before. For more detailed information you can read our original review [here](#). They pay their authors 5 cents a word, with a minimum payment of \$10.

To learn more, read their submission guidelines [here](#).

### **9. The Capilano Review**

A print literary journal based out of Canada they publish poetry and prose. Contributors are paid \$50 per published page to a maximum of \$150. [To learn more visit their website here.](#)

### **10. Breath and Shadows**

They publish only authors who have disabilities, although they define that term broadly. The pay scale is \$5 – \$15 for poetry, \$15 – \$25 for fiction, and \$15 – \$25 for nonfiction. [To learn more visit their website here.](#)

### **11. Contrary Magazine**

Contrary Magazine publishes short stories, flash fiction, essays, and poetry. They pay \$20 per author per issue, length of the piece does not factor into the payment. [To learn more, visit their website here.](#)

### **12. Workers Write!**

They focus on publishing working class literature. They want to collect the stories and poems about jobs that define who we are as individuals and communities. They

pay between \$5 and \$50, depending on length and rights.

[To learn more or to submit, visit their website here.](#)

### **13. Wherewithal**

They publish poetry. They offer a token payment of \$10 per poem. [To learn more, visit their website here.](#)

### **14. Upstreet**

A respected literary journal. They offer between \$50 and \$150 for poems, and between \$50 and \$250 for short stories or essays. If your work is accepted you will also receive a contributor copy. [Learn more here.](#)

### **15. The Sun**

A wonderful advertisement free magazine. They pay from \$300 to \$2,000 for essays and interviews, \$300 to \$1,500 for fiction, and \$100 to \$200 for poetry. They also give contributors a complimentary one-year subscription to *The Sun*. [Learn more here.](#)

### **16. THELMA**

A literary journal that pays \$25 for short stories, \$10 for flash fiction and poetry. To learn more, visit their website [here](#).

### **17. Qu**

Qu, the literary journal of Queens Collage pays \$100 per prose piece, \$50 per poem. [To learn more visit their website.](#)

### **18. Poetry**

Poetry Magazine was founded in Chicago by Harriet Monroe in 1912. The magazine established a reputation early on by publishing many important poems of T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, and many others. They pay a minimum of 300 dollars per poem. You can visit their website [here](#).

### **19. Spark**

Spark: A Creative Anthology offers contributors 2¢ per word or \$20 per work for unpublished writing. They publish poetry and short stories. [Visit their website here.](#)

## **7. AGNI**

AGNI is a respected and established journal. They are published by Boston University. Pay ranges from 1-4.9 cents per word for fiction; \$5-\$50 for poetry. You can visit their website [here](#).

## **20. The Bennington Review**

The Bennington Review has recently been re-founded. They publish two print issues a year and they pay their writers. Prose writers receive up to 200 dollars, poetry writers are paid 20 dollars per poem. To learn more [visit their website here](#).

## **21. Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine**

Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine is one of the better-paying markets there is out there, for science fiction content. This science fiction magazine predominantly

favors character-oriented short stories and poetry. They pay up to a thousand dollars for fiction. You can visit their website [here](#).

## **22. Cricket Media’s Literary Journals**

Their flagship publication billed as “The New Yorker for Kids” publishes poetry and fiction aimed at 9-14 year olds. Read our full review [here](#). However, they also have three other magazines called Babybug (for children 6 months to 3 years), Ladybug (3-6 years), Spider (6-9 years), and Cicada (for ages 14 and up). You can see their submission guidelines [here](#). They pay well.

## **23. Confrontation**

Confrontation is an established and respected literary journal that publishes prose and poetry. They pay \$50-125 for short stories and \$25-\$75 for poetry. They accept very few submissions. To learn more, visit their website [here](#).

## **24. One Teen Story**

A literary journal that publishes one short story for teens a month. They have published a variety of bestselling authors and they have a good base of subscribers. They pay 500 dollars. Read our full review of them [here](#).

## **25. The New Yorker**

It would be strange if such a list did not mention The New Yorker, which is legendary for how well it pays its writers, among other things. The New Yorker does not release the exact amount they pay on their website, although they pay very well. They are a popular magazine more than a literary journal, and publication in the New Yorker can greatly help ones reputation as a writer. Often it leads to book deals and many other publications. Of course, because of this, it is very hard to get a piece accepted by the New Yorker. Many famous authors still try for years. It is easy to submit online and a wonderful opportunity. To learn more read their submission guidelines [here](#).

**26. The Wanderer**

The Wanderer is an online poetry journal, launched in April 2016 as a weekly feature in Harlot Magazine. Now, as Harlot has evolved into a monthly e-zine, The Wanderer has also evolved into a new online magazine, distinct from Harlot. They pay 25 dollars per poem. Read our review [here](#).

**27. One Story**

One Story publishes one short story every three weeks. They have a print and e-versions of the story that they publish. Often the published story is accompanied by an interview with the author of the story. They pay 500 per story. To learn more read our review [here](#).

**28. The Forge**

They pay between 25 and 50 dollars for non fiction and fiction. Learn more at their website [here](#).

**29. Grain Magazine**



Published four times per year, Grain Magazine is an internationally acclaimed literary journal that publishes engaging, surprising, eclectic, and challenging writing and art by Canadian and international writers and artists. They pay 25 dollars minimum 250 maximum. Learn more [here](#).

### **30. The Paris Review**

This very respected print journal only accepts submissions via the post. To learn more visit their website [here](#).

## Chapter 12: How to Find Literary Journals

Now that you know a little more about submitting, you're probably curious about where to find listings of literary journals. There are a lot of literary journal listings out there, and some are better than others.

Authors Publish does not have a formal list of journals at this point, but we review up to five literary journals a week. In our longer reviews, we include submission guideline details, acceptance rates, and payment information; we are very thorough.

The four biggest listing services all have pros and cons, but all are worth using. Below, I review all four.

### **Duotrope**

[www.duotrope.com](http://www.duotrope.com)

Duotrope lists almost all the journals out there that are open to free submissions. They also list journals that

involve a fee, but they are always careful to make note of that.

To find journals on Duotrope you can sign up for their weekly market update, which is an email that informs you of what journals have opened and which ones have closed. You can also use their search engine and their statistics page for more detailed information.

There are many ways to find new markets on Duotrope. In my opinion their statistics page is the most helpful. On this page they list the journals that have the highest and lowest acceptance rates. They also list the journals that are slowest to respond and those that are the quickest. These are all helpful statistics to know.

If a journal takes more than a year on average to respond, I won't submit to them. If a journal accepts over 20 percent of what is submitted to them, I will not send them my work.

Duotrope is a wealth of information; you can monitor the journals you submit to there, and you can use their handy submission tracker to keep track of where you have submitted your work.

Duotrope also provides interviews with the publishers, informs you on how much they pay, and provides various other kinds of information.

Unfortunately, a few years ago Duotrope started charging five dollars a month to use most of its services. You can browse a scaled back version of the site without paying, but to see the truly useful information you have to be a subscriber.

Previously, Duotrope was free for years; however, they often offer free trials and discounts which are worth looking into. They post such offers on their website, as well as their Facebook page. I pay the five dollars a month and never feel any regret about it, but honestly it depends how much you end up submitting.

## **The (Submission) Grinder**

<http://thegrinder.diabolicalplots.com/>

The (Submission) Grinder is a submission tracker that is the free alternative to Duotrope. It is run by Diabolical Plots, which is a genre zine that has been around since 2008, although The (Submission) Grinder has only been around for a few years.

They publish statistics about acceptance rates and response times just like Duotrope does. However, the feedback is not at the same level as fewer people use their service at this point. Hopefully that will change over time.

To see response times and acceptance rates you do not even have to sign up for the service; you can just browse the website. In order to contribute to the website and help improve it, you have to sign up.

*Poets & Writers*

[http://www.pw.org/literary\\_magazines](http://www.pw.org/literary_magazines)

*Poets & Writers* is a magazine that also has a website filled with resources. All of their resources are free and easy to use. In my experience, the most helpful resource they provide is their literary magazine listing service.

They do not list as many journals as Duotrope, and most of the journals they list are based out of the United States. However, they still list over 2,000 journals.

You can look through the listings alphabetically by title or you can apply search filters. When they list a journal, they list what kind of creative writing they accept, if they accept simultaneous submissions, and if they accept electronic submissions. They also tell you if they pay, even if only by a contributor copy. They also list the dates the journal is open to submissions, as well as if it is an electronic or print journal.

This is a lot of helpful information, but nothing is given about response times or acceptance statistics. You still have to visit the literary journals' individual websites to

find out the details of their submission guidelines. *Poets & Writers* also does not update their website as frequently as Duotrope, so some of their information is out of date.

### **The Review Review**

<http://www.thereviewreview.net/>

The Review Review is a review of literary journals. They write up thoughtful, in-depth reviews of literary journals but they also have a simpler, to the point listing of literary journals.

The Review Review doesn't have nearly as many journals on their site as the other services I mention, but the information they do have is easy to navigate and well organized. You can look at it alphabetically or by using a search tool. You can only look at paying markets if you like.





## Chapter 13: Paying to Submit

I have submitted my work to well over 300 different journals in the past two years, and many more before that. When I first started submitting four years ago, one or two journals charged writers a couple of bucks to submit their work for consideration.

This fee did not cover anything else. It did not ensure that the writer's work was considered more seriously; it did not guarantee editorial feedback—all it did was allow the writer to submit their work for consideration to be published.

Most journals back then justified this choice by saying that they were charging writers only two to three dollars and it that cost writers about that much to submit via post. I still took issue with that argument. After all, it is one thing to pay the post office if submitting by mail is the only way, it is another thing to pay a literary journal

to open email, read it, and more often than not, reject your work with a generic email.

I am not opposed to supporting literary journals. I subscribe to a number of them, but they should not be making their money by charging authors directly without offering anything tangible in return. On that same note, I will only enter a contest in which I am rewarded with a subscription to the magazine or with a copy of the winning book.

In the last two years, there has been a solid shift toward charging authors submission fees. Most magazines that charge authors are not going to pay these authors, even if they accept their work. This is a real issue for me.

At first, only older, more established journals were charging readers to submit electronically. It was strange because most of these journals wouldn't even consider work submitted by mail, so paying was truly your only option.

Some journals said this was because submission services that save time for editors, like Submittable (formerly submishmash), charged the magazines to use them. Still, that did not make a huge difference. Many journals managed to skirt this issue by selling people copies, having Kickstarters with rewards writers actually wanted, etc. Also, you could always use email for submissions, particularly if you were a smaller journal.

Lately, I have even seen brand new journals with no reputation and no Submittable account charging readers to submit. This issue has gotten out of hand. But the tipping point has yet to happen; you can still submit to the vast majority of journals for free. I am hoping it stays that way, but I am not assuming that it will.

One of the ways that I push against this new movement to charge to submit is by not submitting to journals that do charge. I also never review them. Authors Publish only publishes reviews of journals that do not charge for submissions.

Even though I no longer submit to *Crazyhorse* and a few other esteemed journals, there are still hundreds of prestigious journals that I can submit to without paying a premium to have my work considered.

One of the additional factors that complicates this whole issue is solicited submissions. Many of the more prestigious journals already solicit many of their submissions from poets that they admire. These poets generally do not submit through normal avenues. They never pay to have their work considered and it is almost always accepted.

Ultimately, you will have to make your own mind up about paying to submit to journals. It is your money, after all. But in the meantime, I will continue to review excellent journals who do not charge writers a fee to have their work considered.

## Chapter 14: Are Contests Worth the Fee?

As an author, editor, professional submitter, and poet, I end up talking about contests a great deal. A lot of writers enter contests, but as a general rule we do not review contests on Authors Publish. This is because there is an entry fee attached to contests.

The first time I ever encountered a contest I was not entering it; instead, I was an intern for a small press. This event took place a number of years ago, and this press is no longer in business. My job as an unpaid intern was to read approximately 400 manuscripts. I had a little over two months to reduce these 400 manuscripts to ten. I was the only one to read these 400 manuscripts, even though on the official contest outlines (for which each person had to pay a considerable fee) it said that each

manuscript would be reviewed by a group of qualified readers.

I handed this pile of ten over to my boss to read, in order to hand over the final three to a very famous writer who was the official judge. However, at the last moment my boss specified several things he wanted to make sure would be included in the chapbook. They were very specific details about the gender of the author and the topic of the poems. One of the manuscripts I had discarded fell into this category exactly, so I removed one other manuscript from the pile of ten and put this one in instead, even though it was not particularly good. This was the manuscript that ended up winning.

All contests are not like this. Many first book contests are highly regulated and have large teams of readers. These contests are usually very prestigious and highly competitive. I have entered a number of these contests because I understand that as a poet, the best way to land a good publisher for your first book is by winning a

contest. Don't assume the judge of the contest will ever see your work, as most judges only read what the readers deem to be the top manuscripts or pieces. This means the readers have a great deal of control over who wins.

There are a number of scams out there for manuscripts. Many presses will agree to publish your book even if it is not a winner, but only if you presell a large number of copies. Finishing Line Press is particularly notorious for this.

Many literary journal contests are expensive, but the competition is less steep. Sometimes they have so few entries in the contest that they struggle to find a winner they can print. When academic journals are involved, and particularly with student run journals, the roles of the readers become a little murkier. Often close friends of the editor end up winning, because theirs is the work that reaches the judge. However, you should not dismiss contests out of hand, but take the following factors into consideration.

### **1. How prestigious is it?**

Make sure that if you're willing to pay to enter the contest, the payoff is worth it. If it is run by a journal that publishes everyone and their mother, even if they have a well known judge attached, you don't particularly want to be associated with that contest. In addition, contests from less established presses are not necessarily regulated in any way. The more famous the journal is the more they have to lose if their contest is discovered as being run incorrectly.

### **2. How expensive is it?**

Short story and poem contests can cost up to fifty dollars to enter; book contests can be over one hundred dollars. The competition for contests with this big of an entry fee is less steep; however, they also tend to be associated with less established organizations that know they will have fewer submitters.



As a general rule I never spend over thirty-five dollars to submit to a manuscript contest, and never over fifteen to submit to a short story or poetry contest. Most established and reputable contests would never charge a fee higher than the numbers I have listed.

### **3. What is the prize?**

Make sure you really want to win the first prize. It is also even better if you would be happy with the second or third prize, or a runner up status. If all those rewards look good to you, then it may be worthwhile submitting.

### **4. Do you get anything for the entry fee?**

Of course it would be nice to win, but you cannot assume that you will win, or even place. Therefore, in the ideal world you will receive something for just entering the contest. Many literary journals that have contests have an option: if you pay for a subscription to the literary journal you will be able to enter the contest for free, or vice versa. Either way, you get a year's worth

of a journal you probably would want to subscribe to anyway.

## **Chapter 15: Anthologies – Another Publication Option**

Anthologies are books that collect work by a variety of authors. Usually the glue that sticks anthologies together is theme. Most anthologies have one. The theme could be very broad and open to interpretation like “Beer,” or very precise like “Poems about meeting Bob Dylan in the 1980s.” Sometimes the subject matter is not what ties together the poems, rather it is something about the author. There are many anthologies of female only poets, for example.

Some anthologies include a variety of writing, poems, flash fiction, nonfiction, etc. Others are only open to one kind of writing, such as flash fiction or epistolary essays.

Many major publishers put together anthologies, but so do a number of small presses. Two of the anthologies I have been published in had editors attached but no presses initially. After the editors had gathered a certain amount of work on the subject, they found a publisher who was interested in publishing the subject matter. One of the anthologies I was published in this way was picked up by the biggest publishing company on the planet. So don't dismiss an anthology just because it does not have a publisher attached.

It is great to get your work published in anthologies for a variety of reasons. One is that most journals publish at least two issues a year, so even if a journal that publishes you has good distribution in bookstores or a steady following online, your work will only be featured in an issue for a small window of time. If an anthology is picked up by bookstores or libraries, it will be held and featured for a longer period of time. The first anthology I was ever published in came out almost five years ago and I still see it regularly in stores.

The second reason is that anthologies are much more likely to be in brick and mortar bookstores in the first place. Some bookstores carry literary journals, but usually only a select few. They carry a lot more anthologies. Libraries also love to buy anthologies. They are also more likely to be used as teaching material in schools.

Anthologies look great in your publication history; they show that you are not just published in literary journals, that your work is likely to be on a bookshelf somewhere in anthology. Manuscript publishers tend to take them more seriously.

So why isn't this book all about anthologies? For one thing, far fewer anthologies are published a year than literary journals. This means that there are a lot fewer opportunities for writers to be published in anthologies. That does not mean anthologies are necessarily more competitive though. Because anthologies are usually

about one theme, they do not generally receive as many submissions as a journal that is open to writing on any theme. The more specific the theme, the fewer submissions they receive.

Also, because journals are published on a regular basis and there are thousands of them, there are a lot of different listing services for them. Because anthologies tend to be open to submissions for only a short period of time (between four months and a year, generally) and then closed to new submissions forever, they are harder to list and harder for potential submitters to find in time. A number of the websites in the additional resources section of this book list anthologies. If you check them regularly, you should see a couple of opportunities every month.

The other main issue is the theme of the anthology. Sometimes you have a poem or short story that fits the theme perfectly, sometimes you have to write one from scratch (although unless you really like the theme, this is

not the most practical option). So finding the right anthology for your work can take a fair amount of time, but it can pay off very much.

## Chapter 16: Your Publishing Journey

It is always tricky to start something new. Every time you submit to a new publication it can feel like a big event. Initially, each acceptance is a celebration and each rejection is a reason to mourn. But things change over time.

When I first became serious about submitting my work, it would take me almost an hour to submit to one publication. Now I can submit to five journals in one hour. It is just a matter of time. Get started and you will become more confident over time.

My most important word of advice is to not give up. One of the tricks to not giving up is to submit to journals that are not *The New Yorker* or *Tin House*. I am not saying don't submit to the most prestigious journals right away. You should. I am telling you to submit to *Tin House* and

a community college publication and a new journal that you know very little about. Just make sure that you are submitting different work to each publisher.

This way you will hear from journals on a regular basis, and you will most likely get acceptances in the first six months. This will feel wonderful and keep you motivated to continue submitting.

You have to remember that you never know where a piece will end up. Just because a brand new journal accepts your story it doesn't mean that it ends there. Perhaps your story will be nominated for an award, or an anthology editor will read it in the journal and want it for her anthology. Both of those have happened to me. Some writers think of publishing poems or short stories as giving them away, but you are not; the rights return to you for reprints and once they are out in the world, much more exciting things are likely to happen.



One of my favorite things is when I receive emails from complete strangers because my poems affected them. This would never happen if my work was not published widely.

Submitting can seem like an uphill battle at first, but the more you submit the easier and more rewarding it can become. I am much happier in my personal life and much more successful in my professional life because of literary journals.

## Additional Resources

This section is organized in alphabetical order. Some of the same websites listed here are covered in more depth in Chapter 12.

### **Creative Writing Opportunities List**

Website: <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/crwropps-b/info>

Creative Writing Opportunities List is a yahoo group that regularly posts new calls for journal submissions, new calls for anthology submissions, as well as contest information, and teaching positions. You can either subscribe to the emails or regularly check the website for postings.

### **Duotrope**

Website: <https://duotrope.com/>

Duotrope is a comprehensive listing of literary journals and magazines that has a submission tracker and information about submission times and acceptance rates. Unfortunately, they now charge users five dollars a month or fifty dollars a year.

### **Poets & Writers Literary Magazine Listing**

Website: [http://www.pw.org/literary\\_magazines](http://www.pw.org/literary_magazines)

Their listings are easy to navigate, but they are not very comprehensive and more importantly do not make it clear if a journal charges writers a reading fee to submit. I do like their [in depth search feature](#), which allows you to search by paying markets, percentage of unsolicited submissions published, and circulation, among other things.

### **New Pages**

Website: <http://www.newpages.com/>

A website devoted to information about literary journals. They have a lot of good information, but they can be hard to navigate and are not always up-front about

submission fees. They are one of the best sites to find calls for anthology submissions.

### **The Review Review**

Website: <http://www.thereviewreview.net/magazines>

A site that reviews literary journals. They have reviewed hundreds of literary journals, largely from a reader's standpoint. They have a good search function that makes it easy to eliminate journals that charge fees.

### **The (Submission) Grinder**

Website: <http://thegrinder.diabolicalplots.com/>

The free alternative to Duotrope. The feedback is not at the same level and the organization leaves something to be desired, but they are free.

## Glossary of Terms

Helpful words to know in the context of writing and submitting. Organized alphabetically.

### **Anthology**

A published collection of poems or other pieces writing, usually on a theme.

### **Chapbook**

A ten to twenty page collection of poetry, or less commonly fiction or creative nonfiction, by one author.

### **Editor**

The person or people who run the literary journal and consider your work for publication.

### **First Publication Rights**

Most publications will not publish work that has previously appeared in a different literary journal, print

or online. Because of this most publishers require First Rights. These can also be called First North American Serial Rights or First Serial Rights. No matter what they are called it usually means that you are giving that publication exclusive rights to publish your poem first. After they publish the work, the rights revert to you, sometimes right away, sometimes after six months.

### **Genre**

A category of artistic composition, characterized by similarities in form, style, or subject matter. Genre can refer to poetry, prose or nonfiction in terms of form. Or it can be a subject matter classification referring to science fiction, mysteries, or various other established types of stories. If a journal says they are not interested in genre work they are using it as a subject matter classification.

### **Literary Journal**

A magazine that publishes primarily poetry, fiction, and/or creative nonfiction.

## **Reader**

Large journals and contests generally have volunteer readers. These individuals read a large chunk of the work submitted and decide what part of that work they are going to pass on to the editors.

## **Manuscript**

An unpublished book length work of fiction, nonfiction, or poetry.

## **Solicited Submissions**

Submissions from authors that a publisher directly requests. Most journals publish a mix of solicited and unsolicited submissions. Editors can solicit the work of friends or of famous or emerging writers. Most of the time when your work is solicited it is published.

## **Submission Manager**

An online program that handles submissions electronically. The most common one is Submittable.



### **Unsolicited Submissions**

The bulk of submissions to most journals are unsolicited.

They are the submissions sent through submission managers, post, or emails to literary journals.

## About Emily Harstone

Emily Harstone is the pen name of a published writer. Her work has been published in twelve countries and four continents, by over fifty different journals. She is a professional submissions adviser and editor.

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