



Submit, Publish, Repeat

How to Publish Your Work in Literary
Journals



What is a Literary Journal?

A literary journal is a magazine that is devoted to publishing written work (and often visual art). Literary magazines usually publish short stories, poetry, and essays.

Literary journals can be print, electronic, or both.

Some literary journals publish a broad swath of work.

Some only publish very specific kinds of work. This could mean they only publish poetry, or science fiction, or work by older women.

In the decade I've spent teaching and writing about submitting to literary journals, I've discovered that in order to motivate most writers to submit, you have to actually start with why they should be submitting.

Why Writers Should Submit to Literary Journals

Reason 1

It is very hard to publish a traditional manuscript without having a history of past publication.

Literary journals are one of the best and most realistic ways to create a “track record” of publication.

This is particularly true when it comes to poetry manuscripts and short story collections, but it is relevant across all genres.

This is one of the reasons I feel so strongly about literary journals being accessible to all.

Even if the work you are publishing in literary journals differs vastly from your manuscript, agents still consider these publications to be a good sign.

For example all the work you've published in literary journals can be poetry, but that will still help support the publication of your novel.

Reason 2

Publishing in literary journals can create a sense of legitimacy, and lead to other opportunities, including but not limited to:

- Improving one's hireability.
- Encouraging others to ask you to participate in readings, and other literary events. Increasing one's literary profile overall.
- Editors soliciting submissions from you.

Reason 3

This overlaps with reason 2, but is significant enough to deserve its own slide.

Submitting to literary journals helps make you part of the larger literary community.

Sometimes this community can seem passive and tangential, but other times, you can get involved with the journal beyond contributing your work.

Reason 4

Literary agents and publishers actively read prestigious and respected literary journals.

Many authors are found by literary agents and/or publishers, because the agent/publisher read the author's work in a literary journal and solicited a submission from them.

Reason 5

Readers can connect with your work and become fans before you've published a collection, if you are actively publishing your work in literary journals. They can help motivate you as a writer, and help support your collection when it is published.

A well-known journal, or one that's very active on social media, can really expand your reader base.

If these readers start following you on social media, this can become data worth sharing with agents while querying.

Reason 6

When your work is published in a collection, you can reach out to the journals that previously published your work. This often leads to the journal promoting your book in one or all of the following ways:

- Promoting your book on social media.
- Reviewing your book.
- Publishing an interview with you.
- Sharing links to your book with their email list.

Often writers tell me they want to submit to literary journals because they want to get paid.

This is an understandable motivation, but not a realistic one. Most journals don't pay, and the ones that do pay, largely pay token amounts.

This is because most journals are a labor of love. The editors, the readers, and everyone involved don't make money off the content, and often contribute their own money to making it possible.

How to Submit Your Work to Literary Journals

Step 1

Prepare your creative work

I could give a week-long lecture on this, but the basics are:

1. Proofread your work.
2. Get creative feedback on your work.
3. Revise your work.

(Repeat as needed)

Step 2

Prepare Your Cover Letter

A lot of writers overthink the cover letter.

It should be formal, short, and to the point.

For example:

Dear Editors,

The following poems are for your consideration. Thank you for your time.

Warmly,

Emily Harstone

Sometimes submission guidelines ask you to include word count, or personal information in your cover letter

Always follow the submission guidelines!

Step 3

Prepare Your Bio

Most journals ask for a 50-word third-person bio, with links.

When you first start submitting, there might not be much you can put in the bio.

The more your work is published, the easier it is to find content for your bio.

I always have more than
one bio ready to go.

I try to match the tone of
the bio to the tone of the
publication.

Step 4

Create a Submission Tracker

A submission tracker is a document or spreadsheet where you keep track of the pieces you've submitted, and which markets you've submitted them to.

It should list the name of the journal, the name of the piece you submitted, and the date you submitted it.

It should be organized into three sections: Pending, Rejections, and Acceptances.

Many new submitters convince themselves that they don't need a submission tracker right away. This can lead to problems.

Simultaneous submissions - submitting to more than one journal at a time - is highly encouraged now, but when your poem or prose is accepted somewhere, you have to withdraw it from everywhere else. This is an impossible task without a submission tracker.

One of the secrets to
getting published is
submitting - a lot!
Submission trackers
help encourage that.

Step 5

Start Researching Journals

This is the big question a lot of people have: Where do I find journals to submit to?

There are lots of resources online, but some of them can be really overwhelming.

We review one literary journal a week, and we also regularly release lists of literary journals.

We are far from the only resource. We also recommend:

[Poets & Writers](#)

[Duotrope \(there is a fee attached\)](#)

[Submittable Discover](#)

[The \(Submission\) Grinder](#)

[Lit Mag News Roundup \(there can be a fee attached\)](#)

[Chill Subs](#)

Step 6

Evaluating a Literary Journal

You can do this step at any time, but it's one of the most important steps.

How you evaluate a journal is deeply personal.

But I'm going to walk you through how I evaluate a journal.

Rust + Moth ★ 383

☰ See other projects related to this listing.

About

Rust and Moth is a literary journal committed to imaginative and engaging poetry. Since 2008, we have dedicated ourselves to discovering new writers and presenting their work alongside evocative graphic design. We believe in the vitality of electronic publication and strive to make our social media loud and relevant. We also believe in the tactile appeal of quality print editions. Our editors value work that errs on the side of immediacy, strong images, and heartfelt innovation. We pride ourselves on our quick turnaround time from submission to publication and we encourage you to submit! Rust and Moth stands firmly on the side of the marginalized and of the voices that have not been traditionally heard. We believe in diversity, and we are committed to the truth that can be conveyed by the written word.

💬 Want more insight into the editors' preferences? Read our [interview with the editor\(s\)](#).

Country of Publication & Year Established

🇺🇸 United States Established in 2008

Publication Media & Frequency

E Electronic Publication	Published 4 x per year.
P Print Publication	Published 4 x per year.

Poetry OPEN

Dates: Open to poetry submissions through 31 March 2022* (approx. 13 days from now).

Track 11



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➔ Go to publication's website

Often I start out at Duotrope - where I can see acceptance levels, and get a loose idea of what the journal is seeking (although this data is not always up to date).

Then I visit the website.

Even if it's a print journal, the website matters. The website is most people's first impression of the journal. It should be quick to load, easy to navigate, and in my opinion, aesthetically pleasing.

I should be able to find creative work easily, and I always read a piece or two before submitting, if it's available online.

This gives me a better understanding of what they publish, and if my work is a good fit.



Rust and Moth

Spring 2022

In Progress—New content added weekly.

Mary Francesca Fontana

Deep South

Susan Cossette

Your Eye Like a Strange Balloon Mounts Toward...

Leah Claire Kaminski

Flung girl

This is the kind of website I like to see - straightforward and easy to navigate, with a satisfying visual image.

Then I read the submission guidelines carefully.

I verify that they are open to submissions.

I verify that they consider the length and genre of my work.

I comply with every single aspect of the submission guidelines. They are guidelines, not suggestions. Many are broad and easy to follow. Some take more time.

As you spend time
evaluating journals,
start to decide what
your priorities are in
terms of publishing.

Maybe you are only interested in print journals, or you only want to make connections with local journals. Still, spend time seeing what else is out there. But start to create a list of journals you want to submit to.

Your goals and
priorities will
probably change
over time.

That's actually
a good thing.

Personally I don't submit to a journal...

- If they are looking for work that is very different from mine.
- If I don't like their website.
- If they have a limited demographic that I am not a part of.
- If they accept most of what is submitted to them.
- If they charge a submission fee.

Why I have a problem with submission fees

- Submission fees are generally 3-5 dollars, which doesn't sound like much, but these add up over time, and prevent a lot of people, particularly members of historically underrepresented communities, from submitting.
- The most prestigious markets are even more likely to charge, even though they have a less than 1% acceptance rate, and largely solicit their submissions.
- I can and have written at length about this, and you can read about it [here](#).

Step 7

Submitting To Literary Journals

Once you get in the habit of it, submitting to literary journals can take less than ten minutes.

Particularly if you've followed the previous steps and have work ready to go.

But that doesn't mean you can skip reading the submission guidelines.

Always read and follow the submission guidelines.

(I stress this point, because it trips a lot of new submitters up.)

Actually Submitting Usually Involves

- Picking which piece is the best fit for that particular literary journal.
- Sending an email or using a submissions manager (Submittable is by far the most common one).
- All that you need to submit, generally, is a cover/query letter, a brief third-person bio, your creative work - all things we've covered before.
- Updating your submission tracker to include that submission.

Step 8

Repeat

What trips most submitters up is that they only submit to 1-5 journals per year.

In order to be actively publishing in literary journals, you should be submitting to at least 50 places a year.

That doesn't mean you need to have 50 pieces - simultaneous submissions are the secret to most writers' success.

A lot of authors challenge themselves to get 100 rejections a year. It's a good goal. When I was submitting the most, I was receiving 150 rejections a year and 20+ acceptances.

In Conclusion

The most common question
I get is: “What if all I’m
receiving are rejections?”

Starting off is always hard.
Once you have a good track
record of publication, it
generally helps.

It also helps to
continually write
new work and
revise old work!

Also try widening
or altering the
range of who you
are submitting
work to.

This lecture is a good starting point, but it is just that. My free eBook, [Submit, Publish, Repeat](#), goes into the details of what I've covered here today.

Thank You & Good Luck!