

Las Vegas Quill Keepers Lesson 2: You MUST Submit!!!

By Cathe Jones, (cathejones.com)

I got eleven emails after the first posting, with a common theme. "I don't know how to submit to periodicals, where do I start?"

I had it easier as a child. I'd put a pen to paper, but the paper into an envelope, send it to the editor of the local paper, and in a week, my work would appear. But babble from a precocious child can only get you so far. As an adult, I found that rejection from an editor was a deeper, darker pain than that from a potential boyfriend.

The first step in submitting to periodicals is in the writing. This comes from writing short pieces, in a definitive style, that sets you apart. The only way to do this is to write articles that you would like to read. If you are interested in birds, then work on three or four articles about birds. What do birds like to do? Why do some have calls and some stay silent? What questions can you develop that you can answer in an article? This is key. Write with knowledge.

If you prefer essay work, then you will still need to ask yourself some questions. Make a list of these questions and see if they develop into more. Let's say you are upset over the way construction companies are taking over your neighborhood. Who is in charge of determining where these construction sites exist? Who has been making decisions regarding the zoning? How does the building affect your home, the animals in the area, the school district? Write as many questions about your topic as you can think of, and group the questions into similar themes. Because you are writing an essay, also keep in mind what feelings you've had regarding the topic you are developing.

In writing for periodicals, you will need to be diligent in your research. Not only do you need to verify information you are claiming to be true, but you need to keep a bibliography of sources you could cite if asked. I have developed a database, written through a simple organizing software package. If I am writing about Dogs, I can go through the previous article research, and then add any new research. This saves hours. If I am asked to write additional materials, I don't restart the research, I go to my database and pull up facts and figures I've found, and use them as needed. If I need to update the facts, I verify them against newer information.

Not only should you research the facts of your article, but you need to research the voice of the periodical. Editors reject for a number of reasons, but one reason that resonates in every literary panel, and in every conference is "The Writer didn't read our work before submission." How can you possibly expect to be accepted by The Nation if your work sounds like Better Homes and Gardens? You won't.

Very often I find myself writing two versions of the same article. For pet care, I write a medically oriented, technically strong piece. This would be submitted to DVM or Pet Product News. The same article can be written without the medical babble, and made to be a family friendly piece which could do well in Critters Magazine, or even Family Circle. If you don't know what the periodical has published in the past, then you are not doing your homework. Hit the library, read past issues. Watch what types of advertisements are accepted. Watch the word choices of the editors in their essays. Watch for the trends of the magazine or newspaper.

Most periodicals have a publishing schedule. Many of them will post this on their websites. I wanted to submit an article about the uses of hand-

held devices for a Christmas issue of Consumer Electronics. I had to send that article in by April of that year. You can go to any website of the periodical you wish to submit to, and see if the publishing schedule is listed. You may see, "Coming Soon: Hair tips for Poodles", or something of that sort. If you can't find the publishing schedule, go to the Contact Us page, and see if you can find an Editorial Assistant listed. Email the Editorial assistant, or even the Advertising Sales Rep to learn what topics are upcoming on the board. Advertising Reps can be your number one contact, and often a foot in the door in learning who to contact in submissions. Learn the art of dual-back scratching.

If you are writing about your disgust in construction in your area, you don't want to submit to a periodical that has that construction company as its primary advertiser. Knowing the advertisers does much to aid in your ability to submit properly. I wouldn't submit to Reader's Digest anything from my Godless Grief book simply because the advertisements are heavily Christian in nature.

I can't stress this next step enough. **YOU MUST READ THE SUBMISSION POLICY OF THE PERIODICAL.** Do not send emails of full articles to any paper or magazine that states, "We do not accept email submissions". Don't send out full articles if the phrase, "Unsolicited Manuscripts are not accepted." Trying to break the rules only shows you as unprofessional. And whatever you do, do **NOT** tell the editor that you are better versed in a topic than she is. Dunderheads and Wannabes do this, not professional writers. It may be that you **DO** know more, but telling someone you are superior to them is a crash into a brick wall your writing career doesn't need.

What can you send? You can usually send a query letter. Queries allow you to accept solicitations for your work. Like a query letter for a book,

you will need to hook an editor in the first few sentences. You've spent some time writing down the questions you want answered, so start there. "Have you ever wondered why construction crews drink on the job, legally?" "How does a woman with two homes in Los Angeles make the zoning laws for New Mexico?" Write the most intriguing questions you have answered in your article, limiting to two or three.

After you've enticed them with the teaser questions, editors want to know what you expect from them. Keep it simple, "I have written an article about The Las Cruces City Council's secret deals with XYZ Construction Company, and I think it will fit in well with the work presented in your magazine." State in a short sentence or two what the article is about, and why you want this particular magazine to present it. Cite a source or two, "After interviewing Leslie Trujan, Police Chief, I learned..."

Let the editor know if you've been published previously. "As a regular columnist in 'Pet Food Monthly'..." List two or three publications, and try to keep the list to places that have larger readerships. Telling the editor you do the newsletter for Joe's Tavern doesn't really sell you. Telling the editor you do the newsletter for the national SPCA sells you. If possible, keep your listing of accomplishments to similar topics. "My essays on slumlords in America have appeared in The New York Times, and my articles on Reliabil Tractors can be found in the last three issues of American Farmer."

If you haven't been published yet, write about your literary related accomplishments. "I am Professor of Verbal Communications at Wassamatta U." "I run a writer's circle in Detroit." "My poetry readings have sold out twenty of the last twenty-three evenings at The Berklee School of Music." And even include books you are working on, if relevant to the article. Keep this self-promotion short, however, and offer the

editor a chance to learn more about you by the words you use in the query.

Don't send an article in the email, or snail mail note, (Remember YOU MUST READ THE SUBMISSION POLICY). State how long the article is in word count and if you have photographs or will obtain them. If you have drawings or other artwork, tell the editor this. Ask if the editor would like to read the article for use in an upcoming publication. AND, let the editor know you've done homework by stating, "I see by your schedule, the October 2006 issue relates to governmental grafts and scams, and I hope you find this topic worthy of consideration for that issue."

Then WAIT. But don't just sit by the computer waiting on a return email, or by the fax machine, or mailbox. An editor who is interested will get back to you, and one who is not, won't. Every once in awhile you'll find an editor who doesn't like your topic, but who can tell by your query what type of writer you are. She may contact you with a counter-article. I got a letter once stating, "I have done dogs to death, can you write a similar story on Llamas?" Three months later, my Llama article appeared in a kid's magazine.

Articles don't just appear. You have to keep writing. If you are working on a nonfiction book, you have articles to write which can support that project. If you are writing a novel, then you can work on articles based on characters of the novel, or psychological changes, or whatever you think will help boost your inspiration for writing more, or selling more later on. I try to write at least three articles a week, including this lesson, which keeps me on my toes. For me, articles serve as a break from long-term topics. They don't always get published, but I keep them around in case an editor someday wants to read more about my rat adventures or the tortoise who doesn't leave my back yard. Out of the nearly 240 articles I

finished last year, only 38 got published. If I gave up after the first rejection, none would have been in print.

Do you want to know where to find editors or periodicals? Want to know where to get facts? Use some of the links below:

<http://www.fedstats.gov/>

FedStats Home Page

Freelance positions and opportunities

<http://WorldwideFreelance.com>

<http://www.associatedcontent.com/>

<http://publishing.booklocker.com/archives/001627.php>

Author's Life seeking authors to interview

<http://www.journalism.org/resources/tools/index.asp> Journalism.org -

Resources - Journalism Tools Index, A to L

<http://www.publisherdatabase.com/search.php>

Publisher Database Search

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