

Submissions! Cover Letters! Oh My!



Writers often publish their work (short stories, poems, essays, etc.) in literary journals. There are many literary journals out there, in both print and digital form. As a writer, you should be reading work published in literary journals to understand what your peers are producing. When you are ready, you can begin submitting your own work to journals you admire!

Resources for finding literary journals:

-[Duotrope](#)

-[Poets and Writers Database](#)

-[Entropy Magazine: Where to Submit](#)

-[Clifford Garstang's Literary Journal Rankings](#)

-Read the bios of writers you like and see where they publish work

The Submission Process:

There are generally two ways literary journals find the work they publish. Some work comes from the editors soliciting well-known writers. Other work comes from submissions sent in by writers (sometimes called “the slush pile”). Each journal has its own process for reading and responding to submissions. Most submissions receive a standard rejection (a general form response). A small percentage receive a tiered or personalized rejection (a rejection that give positive feedback, encourages the writer to submit again, or makes specific reference to the work). A very small percentage receive acceptance for publication (either an unequivocal yes, or an acceptance dependent on some requested edits).

How to Submit:

1. Find journal's submission guidelines
2. Format work according to guidelines
3. Submit work along with requested information (e.g. cover letter, bio, etc.)
4. Keep track of your submissions (submittable, spreadsheet, etc.)

General Formatting:

You should always format your submission how the journal requests. If the journal doesn't specify, format using a standard, legible font, and include your name and page numbers.

Cover Letter:

A cover letter is a note that goes with your submission. Your cover letter should provide a very brief introduction to you and your submission. See guidelines below.

Bio:

When journals ask for a bio, they mean a third-person blurb about you that could be published along with your work. See guidelines below.

General Submission Tips:

- Always be familiar with the journal you're submitting to. You should have an understanding of the type of work they publish and a reason for sending a particular piece to them. It's a good idea to scope out a journal's social media presence, too.
- Find the journal's masthead so you can address your letter to a correct person (usually the genre editor or the editor in chief).
- Avoid saying Mr., Sir, Mrs., Ms., Madame Lady Editor, etc.
- If you can't find a current editor's name, say "Dear Editors" or something similar.
- Read submission guidelines carefully and make sure you follow them!
- Do not include a summary of the submission unless the journal asks for it.
- Some journals pay. Many do not.
- Do not pay a submission fee to journals that don't pay writers.
- Use discretion when submitting to contests--they have their merits but are also kind of a scam.
- Use a neutral, basic font and easy-to-read formatting (double-spaced for prose, single-spaced for poetry, page numbers, etc.).
- Only submit where you would be excited and proud to see your work!
- Tier your submissions so you send a given piece out to more prestigious journals before smaller ones, journals that pay before those that don't, etc.
- Response times vary wildly. Don't expect to hear back right away, especially from big-name journals.

-Keep track of your submissions. If you have a piece accepted somewhere, be sure to withdraw it from other journals right away.

-Remember that most journals are run largely on volunteer labor and that even paid editors are usually underpaid and overworked. These people are reading hundreds of submissions, so be nice to them and don't take rejections personally!

Cover Letter Checklist:

Friendly greeting with editor's name (if available)

Submission title & genre

Submission word count (if prose)

Additional submission information, if applicable ("This is a stand-alone excerpt from a novel-in-verse")

Is this a simultaneous submission? (Say it is, unless journal doesn't allow them.)

Brief biographical information about you

Optional: Brief note about the journal--why you like it, something they published or did recently that you admire.

Any other information that journal asks for

Say thank you!

Your name and contact info (email is most important)

*Always be professional, polite, and personable in your cover letters and other correspondence. Don't say weird things, be overly pompous, or make passive aggressive comments in your cover letter (e.g. *I have submitted to this journal 800 times and despite being published in numerous more prestigious venues, you continue to reject me. Perhaps one day you will see the merit in one of my stories, though I know you likely shan't, seeing as my work is extremely daring and highly intellectual.*). Keep your biographical info and journal praise sincere and minimum. Cover letters should be short and not make you sound an annoying egomaniac.

*These are general guidelines for submitting to literary journals. Journals may have their own guidelines, which you should always follow. Different genre industries have different standard

practices. For example, SFF journals usually forbid simultaneous submissions but respond very quickly. They are also more likely to request a brief summary of your story.

Cover Letter Template:

Dear [Editor's Name],

Please consider this [short story/poem/essay], “[Title]”, for publication in *Journal Name*. It is [word-count] words long and is a simultaneous submission. I am a long admirer of *Journal Name*, and was inspired to submit after reading [Author Name]'s [praising description] story “[Title]” in your most recent issue.

My work can be found in *Journal One*, *Journal Two*, and *Journal Three*. I am currently studying creative writing and [other thing] at the University of _____. [Other relevant thing maybe].

Thank you for your time. I look forward to hearing from you!

[Your Name]

[your email]

[your phone number]

[your address]

Cover Letter Example:

Dear Editors and Readers:

Thank you for considering my short story “Shana Famous” for publication in *Tin House*. It is about 4,100 words long and is a simultaneous submission.

My work can be found in *Mid-American Review*, *Ninth Letter*, and *The Open Bar at Tin House*. I am an assistant fiction editor at *The Offing*.

Thanks again!

Reem Abu-Baker
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Author Bios:

Most journals ask for an author bio, either when you submit or after acceptance. An author bio should be short and sweet, like the cover letter. It should be written in third person, and no more than 3 or 4 sentences. List no more than 3 or 4 publications, and apply similar judgement if you're listing awards, residencies, etc.

Reem Abu-Baker lives in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Her stories can be found in Ninth Letter, NANO Fiction, Day One, and other journals.