

A Basic Intro to Submitting, Submissions & etc^{*}

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*Please note that everything within this guide is not a strict rule that you should follow—you are highly encouraged to develop your own taste and methods for submitting. This is just what we have observed seems to work in the community!

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1. What is submitting?

If you want to share your writing on a bigger stage and get your voice out into the world, then **submitting to literary journals or zines** is the perfect way to get started. Competitions are similarly a good avenue, if you need a bit of extra motivation.

If you are seriously considering a career in writing, having a solid body of work that you can publicly display gives you a higher chance of being noticed by editors and agents, who

regularly read recent issues of journals looking for new talent.¹ Famously, Zadie Smith landed her first publishing contract after having her work featured in a literary journal!

a. How do I know if my work is ready to submit?

Short answer: whenever you feel like it's ready! Long answer: you'll never actually know when the work will be 'ready', but if you don't try, how will you know?

If you're still not sure, ask yourself these simple questions:

Do I keep up with what is currently being published in literary journals?

If you don't read any journals, then you are not ready to publish your work. Familiarising yourself with the avenues, absorbing more of what is being published, and learning from great writers is the groundwork that you need to do before submitting.

Take note, it's all very well to read the work of 'canon' or 'established' poets from poets.org or the Poetry Foundation, but anything written more than 50 years ago is really not a useful marker for what is being published nowadays. The internet is a vast and wonderful place, and nowadays you can't really take a step without running headfirst into a new literary journal.

Read critically! Not everything that gets published is good--what is "good" is a highly subjective term that we'll discuss later--but you will begin to develop your own ideas of what kind of work is good or bad, and that will grow your own work. It's important to read as widely as possible so you can get a good idea of the scope of what is out there.

How is my work fundamentally different from what is already out there?

Are you writing about love? Coronavirus? Death? Great! But how and why should we pay attention to your words when there are thousands more on the same subject? What is reinvigorating, and perhaps, different about your point of view that you want to share with the world? Think about it this way: love has been an everlasting topic in writing, but there are always aspects to the theme less written on. Issues that have cropped up in recent times offer refreshing ways in which you could approach familiar concepts.

¹ Please note that this is not a guarantee, but if it gives you a better chance, why not do it anyway?

This is unfortunate, but when editors or readers are confronted with too many cliches, they are less likely to publish it. A real story: I -- Kwan Ann -- wish that white people would stop writing about their dogs, because although I'm sure they love their dogs very much, they all have fundamentally the same thing to say about it, and the work is not particularly groundbreaking. And I, Shameera, agree with this feeling. White people need to stop writing about how nice trees are.

Optional: Have I edited or shown this work to a trusted friend?

Writing often has a reputation for being a solitary task, but that doesn't have to be the case. Forming groups with other like-minded writers can help you improve your own craft! I find it extremely helpful to show my work to a friend before submitting, and in turn, I read their work critically to help them improve it.

2. How do I submit?

Submission rules vary considerably between different places, so always make sure you **read the guidelines before submitting**. For example, don't submit a 5,500-word story when they specifically ask for 5,000 words at a maximum!

You will usually submit through email or Submittable.

a. Using Submittable

This is the holy grail of all submission managers, and if you want to start submitting in earnest, welcome to the days of sadly staring at that 'In-Progress' submission, wondering when on earth they are going to get back to you.

It's quite straightforward, and Submittable even has a tab that lets you check out what places are open to submissions right now!

<https://manager.submittable.com>

b. Using email

The journal will have an email specifically for submissions (sometimes multiple emails for multiple categories). Ensure that you understand what should go into your attached submission doc, and what should go into your email. Some places will ask that you paste the text of your submission (mostly poetry) into the body of your email.

c. Submission etiquette

DO read the guidelines. For example, if the journal says “only submit 3 poems” then do not send them four poems, as the last one will not even be read.

DO bear the journal’s style in mind. Ideally, you should get to know a journal quite well before submitting so that you are familiar with the kind of work they publish, but sometimes that’s not possible, and we get it! Just don’t do something like submit your science fiction short story to a journal that only publishes poetry.

DO mention if your submission is a simultaneous submission – one you are submitting to multiple places at once. We’d think it keeps editors on their toes, but also it’s just common courtesy to let them know that you might potentially be withdrawing your work. Remember that **some journals will not take simultaneous submissions.**

DO withdraw your work promptly if it has been accepted elsewhere. It’s just the polite thing to do. On Submittable, you can withdraw the whole packet by clicking the Withdraw button, or send a message to the journal with a partial withdrawal.

DO NOT email and bug editors about when your work is going to be considered. Not only is that rude, but it is also annoying, and will make them less favourable to your work, so it would backfire on you. Journals will usually note their response times on their website, so you need to take the most conservative estimate before reaching out to them. So for example, if a journal says that their response time might take between 3–6 months, wait 6 months before sending in a query. No one said that submitting & getting published would be fast!

DO NOT plagiarise! This seems like a very basic rule, but necessary all the same. Rest assured, if you have lifted work, it will come out sooner or later--so why do it in the first place? If you’re unsure what plagiarising in a literary context means, do ask us.

DO NOT send in work that has previously been published. Some journals do accept previously published work, but the majority don’t, and you don’t want a black mark against your name for doing so. Read the submission guidelines to be sure!

DO make sure that you understand what rights you are signing away. It might be extremely exciting to get your work published, but remember to read the contract carefully! Seeing as most journals are heavily US-based, it’s useful to familiarise yourself with some of the terms:

<https://www.writing-world.com/rights/rights.shtml>

d. Formatting your work

Make sure to read the guidelines carefully before submitting your work! Sometimes journals want very specific formats, such as the [Shunn Format](#) or more general requests: Times New Roman, double spaced, docx, pdf files.

If the journal has no guidelines, Kwan Ann would personally suggest staying away from typewriter-like or sans-serif like Arial. There's a running joke within the literary community that Garamond is the best looking font, but she often submits her own work in Baskerville or Cardo. Shameera has submitted & had work accepted in Calibri, though she has since changed to submitting in Times New Roman, Garamond, Baskerville or Cardo. She recommends going with whichever feels appropriate to the work.

For ease of reading, we would also suggest a regular 12pt font and at least 1.5 spacing. However, these are only suggestions (not prescriptive in any way) & should not hinder experimentation with different stylistic forms and shapes.

e. Writing a cover letter

Keep it short and sweet! If you have something nice to say about the journal, go ahead! If you only have bad things to say about the journal, then...why are you submitting?

A concise example:

Dear Editors and Readers [best to address the editor by name if you can],

Please find enclosed [a poem/short story/etc], titled [title of piece]. Thank you for your consideration. [If applicable, something you like about the journal/a piece they published that you admire. One or two sentences will do!].

[This is a simultaneous submission and will be withdrawn immediately if it is accepted anywhere else: optional]

Best,

[your name]

[insert a short third person bio here]

Some examples of a good third-person bio:

- Monica Youn is the author, most recently, of *Blackacre*, which won the Poetry Society of America's 2017 William Carlos Williams Prize.
- Haolun Xu was born in Nanning, China. He immigrated to the United States in 1999 as a child. His writing has appeared in *New Ohio Review*, *Ruminate Magazine*, and more. He currently reads for *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*.
- Taylor Byas is a black Chicago native currently living in Cincinnati, Ohio. She is now a second year PhD student and Yates scholar at the University of Cincinnati, and an Assistant Features Editor for *The Rumpus*. She was the 1st place winner of the Poetry Super Highway Contest, and her chapbook, *BLOODWARM*, is forthcoming from Variant Lit in the summer of 2021. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *New Ohio Review*, *Borderlands Texas Poetry Review*, *Glass*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *Hobart*, *Frontier Poetry*, *SWWIM*, *TriQuarterly*, and others.

If a journal asks for a bio within a certain word or character count, tailor your bio to fit these constraints.

f. Paid submissions

You may see submission calls or contests that charge a submission fee. These fees are often used to support the magazine, pay staff, pay contributors, or contribute to a final prize pool. Some places offer a limited number of free subs, after which you have to pay. Some will offer faster response times or feedback if you choose to pay a small fee.

The usual principle is that money should flow towards you as the writer, not away. But it's up to you to decide if paying a submission fee is worth it or not. Maybe you like that magazine and don't mind supporting it monetarily. Maybe the contest or venue is big enough that you're willing to invest the fee. But there are plenty of places with free submissions, so keep those in mind too.

3. Where should I submit?

There are lots of places that you could submit to, and ideally, as you move through the writing world, you'll start to build up your own ideas of what you like and where you think your work would fit in.

a. Submitting to genre journals/magazines

'Genre' is a wide umbrella that covers science fiction, fantasy, horror, noir, and more. You may also see terms like furry fiction, cli-fi, or speculative fiction. Most of these magazines do not charge for submissions and pay anything from token fees to the SFWA professional rate of 8 US cents/word.

Do bear in mind that ‘genre’ does not equal ‘easy acceptance’. These are competitive markets with variable rejection rates, the same as other literary journals.

If you’re interested in submitting to genre magazines, it’s important to keep the mood and existing content of the journal in mind. Don’t send your light-hearted, happy fantasy to Nightmare Magazine!

b. Some lists of places to submit to

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but here are a few places and links that will get you started:

- <https://entropymag.org/category/where-to-submit/>
- https://www.pw.org/literary_magazines
- <https://www.neonbooks.org.uk/big-list-literary-magazines/>
- <https://thejohnfox.com/2016/05/poetry-submissions/>
- <https://blog.reedsy.com/literary-magazines/>

If you’re not really satisfied with this or you’re looking to really get into the writing community, we highly recommend **making a writing/literary Twitter!** This is a hotspot for not only finding new places to submit to, but communicating with other writers.

A note: Be on your guard when submitting to newer journals, especially if they require a submission fee. Some things to look out for are a clear masthead that clearly lists its editors’ names and have some internet presence, and it doesn’t hurt to conduct a little research first to make sure that you aren’t submitting to a journal with a suspicious history.

As for competitions, keep an eye out for opportunities on writing groups (such as the Malaysian Writers’ Group, international websites and Twitter.

4. Rejections

So you’ve submitted, waited, and they’ve gotten back to you... but it’s a rejection.

While it’s easy to think that your work isn’t good enough or that they just didn’t like it, that’s usually not the case.

Thinking about it logically, lots of journals are run by volunteers who dedicate their time to the job because they like it. Perhaps that day they weren’t in the right mindset to appreciate your work, or even just didn’t have space for it in the upcoming issue. Other times, because it’s a reality of life, you might be writing on important topics such as race or religion, and unfortunately get an editor on the

other side who simply doesn't care about these things--in that case, the place wasn't really right for your work anyway, so don't worry!

Rejections can be upsetting, but **do not reply to rejections and get nasty**. Editors talk. They're also on social media. Retorting to rejections is an excellent way to get your name blacklisted not just for that publication, but others within that sphere.

Occasionally, you might get a 'tiered rejection'--the best kind, because they clearly saw something in your work, and it's an invitation to send more work to them! If you receive direct feedback or comments, take it as a good sign (but don't feel obligated to make any editorial changes suggested unless you think they can improve your work).

More importantly, it's important to know that rejections are not necessarily indicative of the quality of your work, which, again, is not a measurable metric. Please do not feel disheartened, and remember to keep pressing on! Take comments on board if and when they arise, keep writing and you will find that it's easier to know how to improve as you go along.

5. Payment/Compensation

Every journal or venue will have its own way of paying or reimbursing its contributors. You may be paid for your work in cash, copies of the journal you appear in, or discounts on future workshops/publications...or you might not receive any payment at all. The smaller journals that cannot pay their contributors often make up for it by heavily promoting past contributors on social media or nominating contributors for awards.

Cash payment is usually disbursed through PayPal, as money transfers/cheques can be expensive and burden either you or the journal. Some places may ask you to invoice them on acceptance, so be prepared for that, too. If there are any special requirements for payment, the guidelines should let you know.

There's no one right answer to decide where you should send your work. If earning money from submissions is an important goal for you, aim for journals that pay their contributors, and support those which are working toward becoming paying venues. If you think the tradeoff in promotional help, community support, prestige or portfolio is worth an unpaid acceptance - go for it.

If you have further questions, feel free to send a message to Shameera & Kwan Ann. Happy submitting!