

Publishing

Most poets start by publishing several pieces in magazines and journals before looking to place chapbooks (short poetry collections) or book-length manuscripts. In this chapter, I'll be focusing on how to submit individual poems.

Choosing Markets

Browse the book *Poet's Market* or the sites Newpages or Duotrope in order to learn about specific calls for submissions, tastes, guidelines, and competitiveness of the hundreds (thousands?) of literary journals out there. It's always a good idea to read and research the markets you're submitting to so you know you're aiming for the right targets. It saves everyone a lot of time and helps you practice literary citizenship.

Payment and Fees

Some big-league journals, like *Poetry*, pay very well. Some pay a modest amount. Most pay in contributors' copies or with links to you, the reality of the financial situation of most small presses. Sometimes you may even be asked to pay a small submission fee if you're using an online submission system. Contests almost always require fees to help cover the costs of judging, prize money, and publication.

Scams

While many poets are critical of any kind of fee system, it is important to understand that a fee does not necessarily equate to a scam *unless you are asked to pay to see your work in print.*

"Publishing" is an excerpt from the book
How to Write a Poem, by Tania Runyan.

These organizations ask for poems then tell their submitters they have “won” publication. However, these publications are little more than vanity anthologies that sometimes cost upwards of \$50. Avoid them!

Preparing the Manuscript

Most magazines ask for 3-5 poems, single spaced. Always check publishers’ guidelines to confirm details. Poems do not need to be related, although sometimes a series can be an engaging read.

Do not use fancy fonts, italics, colors, or sizes over 12 point. Times New Roman is a safe way to go. Check journals’ web sites for specific formatting instructions, such as whether to put your name, address and/or email on each page.

Most magazines also want a cover letter or a bio. Be professional and to the point. Most magazines don’t like “cute” cover letters that talk about kayaking and pet Boston Terriers. Offer information about previous publications, if any.

Sample Cover Letter with Publications

Dear Editors:

Please consider the attached poems for publication. My poems have appeared in several publications, including *Willow Springs*, *Indiana Review*, *Nimrod*, *Poetry Northwest*, and *Southern Poetry Review*. I appreciated your article about imagery in your spring issue and hope my work can find a place in your pages in a future

issue. Thank you so much for your time!

Sincerely,

Tania Runyan

What if you don't have any previous publications? You need to start somewhere, right? If you don't have publications to list (yet!) but don't want your cover letter to sound too abrupt, think about adding a brief statement about your work.

Sample Cover Letter Without Publications

Dear Editors:

Please consider the attached poems for publication. For the past year, I've been working on writing poems from the point of view of classic movie characters. I hope they can find a home among your pages. I've enjoyed the diversity of authors you've been highlighting these past few issues. Thank you so much for your time.

Sincerely,

Tania Runyan

Most magazines take online submissions through systems like Submittable. Again, don't be alarmed if some publications charge a few dollars to cover the costs of using this service.

Some publications still accept "snail mail" only. If you

send your submission by mail, make sure you include enough postage, of course, and always include a SASE for the reply.

Simultaneous Submissions

The term *simultaneous submission* refers to a set of poems you send out to more than one publication at the same time. It's important that you note which magazines forbid simultaneous submissions, as nothing annoys an editor more than a poet who doesn't follow directions in this matter.

What problems can arise from simultaneous submissions? When a magazine accepts a poem for publication, it obtains First Serial Rights, or First North American Serial Rights (FNASR). These rights allow the journal to take credit for being the first publisher of your work. After publication, rights revert back to the author. This means you can include the work as part of a collection, for example, or reprint it in an anthology, as long as you always credit the first publisher as, well, the *first* publisher.

If two publications accept your poem at the same time, it will be impossible for both of them to obtain FNASR. Miscommunication or bad timing can cause significant problems. Some publications would rather not deal with the headache of sorting this out, but many agree to accept simultaneous submissions as long as you immediately withdraw your work upon acceptance elsewhere. That way, there is no confusion about who gets FNASR.

Keeping Track

Writers need to keep track of what, when, and where they submit, especially when sending out simultaneous submissions.

The submissions site Duotrope charges a fee but tracks pieces, submissions and statistics for you in great detail. I find the annual fee quite reasonable, given the time it saves. Other writers prefer to make their own spreadsheets and charts. Do what works to keep a track record of your poems' incredible journeys.

Editor TLC

Most editors do this job for little to no pay, working for the love of poetry. Sometimes they get overwhelmed, lose submissions by accident, or don't reply in a timely manner. Remember they are human and, the majority of the time, doing the best they can with their resources. If you have questions for an editor about a submission, err on the side of generosity. For example, if a journal's site says to wait three months to query, give it four. Always assume the best and keep politeness at the forefront of your communication. Impatient and demanding writers are usually...remembered.

How Long Will it Take?

Publishing is not a science. Some poets hit the jackpot the first time out. Some send submissions for years. While there are no promises in the world of publication, with consistent effort, organization, and, most of all, attention to making your own work the best you can, you will most likely find some homes for your work.

tania runyan

How to Write a Poem

based on the
BILLY COLLINS
poem "Introduction
to poetry"

includes anthology
& prompts!

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:FG *field guide series*