



The
**American
Directory**
of

**Writer's
Guidelines**

What Editors Want, What Editors Buy

From more than
450
Magazine & Book Publishers

Compiled and Edited by John C. Mutchler

The
**American
Directory**
of
**Writer's
Guidelines**

What Editors Want, What Editors Buy

*Compiled and Edited
by
John C. Mutchler*



Fresno, California

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For Susan,
and
for Rachel and Sarah,
the essence of our love.

Acknowledgments

MANY HANDS HELPED ME build this book. Some of the hands involved were patient, hard-working hands. My wife, Susan, became an expert at stuffing and stamping envelopes and at doing whatever had to be done to keep the project moving. My publisher, Steve Mettee, showed continuous patience, as well as good humor, while teaching this author some tricks of the trade.

Two of the hands were mentoring hands in the truest sense. Donald R. Gordon, himself a well-published gentleman, helped me immensely in his role as my instructor for a writing course I was immersed in at the time the idea for this book came to be in me (Long Ridge Writer's Group). D.R. gives best what would-be writers need most: honest critique and words of encouragement backed by the knowledgeable tone of his experience.

Most of the hand prints on the book belong to the many publishers, editors, editors-in-chief, managing editors, editorial directors, editorial assistants and assistant editors, among others, who consented to have their work included as part of my work. It has only been since I started work on this book that I finally achieved a broad understanding of what you are all about. The insight into your collective world has been fascinating.

My hands applaud you all. Thank you.

Introduction

DEAR FELLOW WRITER,

For many years I helped write and produce sales literature, promotional material and product user documentation for corporations such as Litton Industries, Inc. and Johnson Controls, Inc.

I wish I had been fortunate enough during that time to have had clear-cut writer's guidelines to help ensure the first draft of the copy I produced was as close as possible to what it had to be in final form. Many hours of hard work (read *rewrites*) could have been saved, had that been the case.

You might say I learned the hard way that writing without guidelines is a time-consuming and not very rewarding pursuit.

About a year ago I decided to try my hand at writing again and became determined to use what I had learned during those early corporate days to help myself and other writers become better marketers. I decided to create a book to help writers better understand what they had to do to market their work effectively. I knew the key to such a book would be writer's guidelines, not in distilled form, but the real thing.

This book is the result. It is filled with the "real thing." It can help you produce more marketable pieces by guiding your efforts as well as providing you with thousands of fresh ideas on what to write about.

Hundreds of editors from a diverse collection of periodical and book-publishing houses have generously contributed their writer's guidelines for this directory.

Editors create guidelines to explain where they are coming from editorially speaking; to explain *exactly* what they expect to receive from writers. Simply put, these expectations can be boiled down to two things: professionalism in the business end of things, including queries and manuscript format, and—most important—good writing, properly slanted toward the interests of those who read their publications or purchase the books they produce.

Collectively, these guidelines represent a thorough primer on how to become a more successful writer *and* marketer. Study them to discover what editors want, what editors buy.

Such a set of "buyer expectations" is standard fare in most industries. Almost every day, in the course of working at my current day job as business development manager for a small but successful web printing press automation company, I am confronted with the equivalent of writer's guidelines—known as product specifications in the printing equipment industry. Potential buyers of our products and ser-

vices tell us what they need (or want), and we set out to create the best possible product configuration that will satisfy their requirements. I never argue with these prospects or consider their “demands” unfair. I don’t waste their time or mine by trying to offer them something that misses the mark by a wide margin. If we decide that we want to do business with these people, we simply conform to their expectations to the extent possible, sell them on our ability to deliver as promised, and then try our best to deliver a bit more than what we actually promised.

I try to do the same with my writing. I think of the guidelines in this book as “the buyer’s expectations.” Then I try to meet or exceed these expectations. I encourage you to do so, too, and sincerely hope you’ll benefit from perusing them as much as I have.

Best wishes for your writing and marketing success.

John Mutchler

P.S. If you would like to make a comment or suggestion about how this book could be improved, e-mail me at jmutchler@worldnet.att.net

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How to Use This Book

- Publications and publishing houses are arranged alphabetically by name: periodicals in Section One and book publishers in Section Two. Contact information for submissions is shown at the end of each set of guidelines.

- At the back are two indexes. The Topic Index is a list of areas of interest such as agriculture, science fiction or woodworking. Names of the publishers interested in seeing material on or relating to these subjects and the page number where the particular publisher's guidelines may be found are listed along with the subject. The General Index provides an alphabetical list of the various publications and publishing houses as well as other items.

When you already have an idea:

If you have a certain subject you wish to write about, consult the Topic Index. Periodical publishers are *italicized*, book publishers are set in roman type. If you know the name of the publisher or periodical you are looking for, look in the General Index.

To develop new ideas:

Brainstorm for article, short story and book ideas by browsing both the guidelines themselves and the Topic Index. Doing so should be enough to shake loose some wonderfully creative thoughts from even the most horribly blocked minds in the writing universe.

Keep track of your submissions:

Photocopy the Submission Tracking Sheet on pages 528 and 529 to track and jot notes about your submissions.

A couple of notes:

The guideline contributors selected the topics under which they are listed from a list supplied to them and added their own subjects when appropriate. The guidelines have been left much as they came in but were edited to avoid repeating *basic* manuscript preparation and submission requirements. You'll find this information in *Marketing Your Work Professionally* on page 2 and *Standard Manuscript Format*, page 6. Some publishers have special requirements, so be sure to check individual guidelines carefully before submitting.

Marketing Your Work Professionally

A HIGH-PROFILE MAGAZINE MAY RECEIVE HUNDREDS of submissions each month, yet publish fewer than twenty articles or stories per issue. Likewise, many book publishers receive hundreds of submissions each year, but—without regard for the quality of the submissions—can only publish a small percentage of what comes in.

For argument's sake, and because it'll be pretty close to the truth in many instances, let's say a publisher's acceptance-to-rejection ratio represents a one-in-fifty chance of any individual submission being published. While these are good odds compared with those offered by any of the various state lotteries, one-in-fifty still represents a highly competitive market.

How can you shave these odds? By making certain your submission fits what the editor needs and that your writing, including grammar, spelling and punctuation—along with its physical presentation in the form of your query letter, proposal or manuscript—adheres to professional standards.

A good place to start on this professional course is by studying a publisher's writer's guidelines. It's here, at least in the better-written guidelines, that you'll find exactly what an editor needs in content, word count, tone, focus, voice and the other elements that go into making up a successful submission.

And, although most editors prefer to see query letters or book proposals instead of complete manuscripts, photocopies of art or photographs instead of originals, and are pleased with a standard manuscript format as shown on page 6, if a publisher does have special requirements for submissions, the place to find these requirements is in the publisher's guidelines. Guidelines offer a wealth of information, and the smart—the professional—writer checks them out before submitting.

Making it past the first cut

The stack of unsolicited submissions—in publishing jargon called the “slush pile”—is so tall on the desks of many editors that they have developed methods similar to ones used by individuals in other industries who must deal with a heavy volume of incoming mail.

For example, if a personnel manager advertises to fill a vacancy, she may receive dozens of resumes in response. She may approach the task of evaluating the resumes by sorting them into two piles, those which exhibit a professional appearance and those that do not. This is a “first cut,” and the sloppiest of the resumes will not survive it. She assumes those who submitted sloppy resumes will, if hired, do a sloppy job. And it's a good bet she's right.

Editors are not unlike our make-believe personnel manager. Here are some things you can do to assure your submission makes it past the first cut:

- Use 20- to 24-pound, good quality, letter-sized white paper for manuscripts and book proposals. Query letters and cover letters may be on your letterhead. If you use fanfold computer paper, separate the pages and tear off the line holes.

- Type or print on only one side of a page.

- Avoid difficult-to-read copy. Editors prefer clean, dark type. Anything hard to read has a good chance of rejection. Photocopies should be top quality. Handwritten copy is almost always the kiss of death. Check individual guidelines to see if dot-matrix submissions are accepted.

- Unless a publisher's guidelines call for something different, follow a standard manuscript format such as the one shown on page 6 including:

- Double-space all manuscripts and book proposals (cover letters and query letters are single-spaced.)

- Allow generous page margins, at least one inch left and right, and one and one-half inches top and bottom. Type the title about one-third of the way down from the top of the first page.

- Indent paragraphs and leave the right side unjustified.

- Do not hyphenate words at the end of a line.

- Include your name, address and daytime telephone number (including area code) on all letters and on the first page of all manuscripts.

- Include a slug line consisting of your last name, a key word taken from the title of the piece, and the page number at the top of the second and subsequent pages of a manuscript.

- Include an SASE (self-addressed, stamped envelope). Most editors won't acknowledge receipt of or reply to—and some report they don't even read—an unsolicited submission unless it is accompanied by an SASE. This can be a large envelope for the return of all the material you submitted or a business-sized envelope for return of your cover or query letter and perhaps one or two sheets from the publisher. If you do not wish any part of the material you submitted returned to you, you may mark the outside of your submission "recycle if rejected" and include a self-addressed, stamped postcard, with the details of the submission written on it, for an editor to use in acknowledging your submission. If you submit to a foreign publisher, include International Reply Coupons for the return postage. Never include metered postage, coins, currency, checks, or stamps in lieu of affixing the correct postage.

Other things you can do

Focus your submissions to the right publishers. Don't send book proposals on woodcarving to publishers of political commentaries or an article on vegetarian cooking to business magazines. Look through the guidelines for publishers who have a history of publishing material similar to what you plan to submit, then familiarize yourself with exactly what they publish. This is particularly true with periodicals. Obtain and read at least the last four or five issues.

Consider submitting to the less glamorous markets. The large, highly-visible publishers are inundated with submissions and may choose authors with name recognition over others. Search for smaller publishers that specialize in the topic you're writing about or those that don't yet have vast distribution. After you have a few articles or stories published and/or a book or two under your belt, the heavily sought-after publishers are likely to be more receptive to your proposals.

Always submit your highest quality work. This means that you will have double-checked spelling and grammar. It also means that you will have checked your facts. Many editors rely on writers to check facts, quotations, citations, and the spelling of names and foreign words.

How long shall I wait?

Most editors don't have time to spend on the phone with authors calling to see if the editor has read a query letter or book proposal. If five or six weeks have gone by and you haven't heard anything, it's OK to drop the editor a self-addressed, stamped postcard with a note asking about the status of your submission. If you still don't hear anything, the editor is a louse and you should simply move on.

Query letters

Nonfiction editors often want to see query letters instead of book proposals or complete manuscripts. A query letter is simply a one-page, single-spaced letter, addressed to a specific editor by name, asking if he or she would be interested in seeing an article or book proposal.

Query letters need to come right to the point. Begin with a sentence that will capture the attention of the editor, then, in four or five paragraphs, outline what you are proposing and why you are qualified to write it. Since this letter runs the chance of being the only example of your writing the editor is going to see, it needs to be your best. This is no place for extra words or thoughts. Write your query letters crisply and succinctly.

Book proposals

With novels, a writer without a successful track record will nearly always need to submit a finished manuscript, but nonfiction books are often presented and sold to editors—even by first time book authors—before they are written. This is done with an outline called a book proposal. A typical book proposal, about ten to thirty double-spaced pages, consists of an overview that includes a summary of the book, where and to whom the book will sell, an approximation of how many words it will have, what illustrations, if any, will be included, why the author is qualified to write the

book and all other pertinent information that may convince the editor to commit to the project. It also includes a table of contents and one or two sample chapters.

Precise instructions for writing a book proposal are contained in *The Portable Writers' Conference* workshop by agent-author Michael Larsen titled "Sell Your Book Before You Write It." *The Portable Writers' Conference* is available at libraries or bookstores.

Electronic submissions

Because it saves re-keyboarding, many publishers now want computer files of a manuscript accepted for publication as well as hard copy. Unfortunately, with all the different word processors and other software programs available, there are many non-interchangeable formats for these files. However, most current software programs can save a text file in a variety of formats, one of which will probably be acceptable to the publisher.

Consult the publisher's guidelines or check with them about which formats are acceptable. If you find you need to convert your files to a format your software can't handle, DataViz, Inc. (55 Corporate Drive Trumbull, CT 06011, 1-800-733-0030) makes a useful utility called Conversions Plus which not only converts format to format for most popular software programs, but will do so across the Macintosh and PC platforms.