

WRITING FOR MAGAZINES

WHY WRITE FOR MAGAZINES?

- Magazines have a wide reach in terms of audience / readership
- Share your knowledge

Focus on subjects that you may know a great deal about; or qualified to write on (such is the case for journals); or have direct experience of

- Relevance
- Editorial Guidelines
- Build rapport with Editors and Sub-Editors; and readership
- Gets your work out there! ...establishes your “voice” as a writer

First Stages (How did I do it?)

- Do your research!!! – How could my research impact or make a serious contribution?
- Identify your target publication(s) / media

- Read the publication(s) and get to know the style, layout, content, relevance – it’s alright to consult the ‘Writers and Artists Yearbook’ however, it is unacceptable not to have read a magazine that you intend to submit an article / feature to!
- Look at the magazine’s profile – how long has it been established?
- Understand the readership / target audience / circulation
- Editor / Sub-Editor / Where is the publication located? UK or elsewhere?

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- What, when, where, why and how – helps establish “relevance” and “angle”
- Identify how your work could add value; or be included as part of a ‘feature’
- Looking at past editions, has your idea(s) been covered recently? (recently being up to three years?)
- Writing Guidelines – most magazines have “writing or editorial guidelines” and are available via the internet or upon request.
- Does the magazine or journal have an additional online platform or moved completely to online?

- What additional content can you bring to your articles? Photographs?

MOVING AN IDEA FORWARD

- Ideas for articles come from a variety of avenues – significant dates; anniversaries; contemporary sources (people/social activities); events; up and coming events.
- Relevance / Topical / Unique? – how relevant is your idea and how can this be formed into an article that will appeal to readers?
- Is your idea a “one-off” or could it form a “series”?
- Is it an article, interview or review?
- Is your idea in line with the magazine’s culture or style?
- Will your idea / article appeal to your Editor; and subsequently to your audience / readers?

MOVING AN IDEA FORWARD

- Remember a monthly magazine or monthly journal will normally have a standard lead-in time of 3 months minimum. Features tend to work 6 – 8 months ahead.

- Weekly magazines or journals (which tend to be online now), are better in accommodating the “here and now” ideas. ‘Here and Now’ are immediate articles. They could be an interview or form part of an obituary feature that will have a tight deadline.
- Does your idea comply with writing guidelines? – if not, you may have to explain to an editor why and how the “angle” in your submission should be received.
- Submission (always try to aim for at least a week before deadline)
- Don’t assume your article(s) will make it to the final published edition.

HOT and COLD – GETTING A SCRIPT TOGETHER

Working Title, Synopsis and Plan –

Working Title – should act as a prompt / focuser for the writer. The Working Title may not be the final chosen title of course

Synopsis – a brief outline of the article in no more than 5 lines.

Plan – beginning, middle and end. Divide up your plan so that you are clear with order and intended markers to ensure you have covered off all relevant points to subject matter. This is useful to determine word count allocation.

Research – decide how much of your research is relevant to your proposed article and to be used. A little can go a long way, that is to say can you develop your research into a series of 2 or more articles?

Draft Script – This should not be considered the final article. My rule is “get writing, polish later” – not only can you work freely, you will also be able to see where your focus has been and perhaps where it should be reallocated. The draft script also brings out the “waffle” that can then be edited back to eliminate padding and duplication, in favour of improved phrasing and more-economical use of nouns and adjectives. At the drafting stage, which could result in three, four or even five draft scripts, detail can be removed in favour of something new or more relevant; detail can be honed.

Final Script – This is where the polishing takes place. The final script should not be introducing anything new in the way of detail. If you are fortunate in having a “proof-reader” then your final script should take into account any points raised by the “second pair of eyes.” If you don’t have a proof-reader, my advice is complete what you believe to be your final script, and then “sleep on it.” The following morning will likely reveal any last-minute changes.

Final Title – your final title may not have been your working title. Be sure your final title it is snappy, attention grabbing and again, relevant to your article. If you use “irony” in your title, please make sure it relates somewhere to subject matter and doesn’t dilute your objective(s) for the article; or has the potential to cause offence or even litigation.

Word Count – editors are strict. They like articles to be within 100 words either-way of the agreed word count. Word counts do not include titles or references.

Format – Editorial guidelines will state format; however normally for articles:

- Microsoft Word. PDFs are seldom accepted as these can cause conversion and layout issues for the editorial team.

- Double spaced lines;
- 1st line of paragraph inset.
- Page numbers at foot of page
- Title Page – we shall focus on this in a moment

SUBMISSION, PUBLICATION and AFTERMATH

Submission of article should be 1 document.

Additional media (photos) should be separate and not included in the body of article

Pagination: Don't forget page numbers on your final script!

The word – ends – should be placed at the end of the article and before listing references

Word count does not need to be placed at the end of the article (as this is shown on the front page)

Any References that support your article, particularly in the case of research / evidence to back up claims, are always listed at the end of the article. I have always used the Harvard referencing system; Author, year of publication, title of publication, publisher, page number.

(**REMEMBER**: the author has no editorial control on submitted content or preferred layout)

Title Page – how should this look?

Name, address and full contact details – top right-hand corner

Centre 1/3 down – Title of Article. Word Count

Centre Box – Note to Editor

Bottom Left-hand side: FBSR

Final Script!

Make sure you have attached the correct final script. Always worth a final read through before submission

First British Serial Rights (FBSR)

Placing the letters 'FBSR' means that you are agreeing to hand over all rights to the magazine your article is being sent to. This legally allows the editor of the magazine the free choice to publish and re-

publish. Should you as an author, wish to re-publish, you will need to gain permission from the magazine's editor in order to do so.

In the case of FBSR – this is exclusively for British publications

First United States Serial Rights – this should not be abbreviated and should be stated in full.

If you are submitting to a European magazine that is not British, you will need to seek legal advice or guidance from the applicable editor.

Sending To The Editor

Submitting to an editor, normally via Email these days, needs to be business-like, straight to the point and confirm that you have adhered to the magazine's writing guidelines.

Building a rapport with an editor can take months, even years. First articles are normally cold submissions by authors; unless an editor has approached you (commissioned piece). First articles do not result in payment to the author.

Payment to authors come with an editor either commissioning an article(s) or accepting regular submissions – it is a balancing act. The frequency and quality of submitted work really does help progress toward being paid for articles.

Checklist:

- Are you sending your article to the correct magazine editor?
- Have you spelt their name correctly?
- Have you attached your article (complete with front page) and attached any additional media (photos)?
- Have you submitted by deadline?

Publication and Invoicing

You cannot assume your article will make the final editor's choice and move to publication. Allowing for some lead-in time, which may have included enough time for your target magazine edition to pass, you should enquire about any unpublished work.

Occasionally, some articles are held back for future publication and stored in an editorial article-bank. Such was the case with one of my articles for 'This England.'

In the case of an unpublished article and confirmation that the editor of the magazine you originally sent the article does not intend to publish, you can decide to withdraw the article and make available to another editor of a different magazine. This has happened to me with a couple of my astronomy articles.

Where an editor has agreed to publish and pay for your article, the price should not be negotiated. It's all about building trust and rapport – the long-term effect of working with a magazine will result in financial gains. Invoicing is normally submitted upon publication, unless otherwise agreed.

The Waiting Game

There are no fixed rules regarding publication – intended features have sometimes been put-back, postponed until another month, quarter or year; on odd occasions, completely cancelled for good.

With some magazines working up to 6 months ahead of publication, the waiting game can be trying on an author. This time is best spent moving on to the next article and building rapport. One-off articles seldom result in a returning editor or commissioning.

RECORD KEEPING - *A simple Spreadsheet is recommended.*

- Title
- Date of Submission and FBSR offered?
- Magazine submitted to
- Editor
- Publication Date
- Invoiced amount (if any) and payment received
- Comments – brief synopsis, reason for article, review date