

SUBMITTING TO POETRY MAGAZINES: SOME TOP TIPS

by Julia Bird

A first magazine publication is a step towards becoming a poet with a public profile and a readership, and that instant of acceptance is an intense kick. Poets who are ready to take this step themselves need only a persuasively dazzling poem, the price of a stamp, and a plan.

Poetry magazines get filed on a constantly shifting shelf. For every august journal with a decades-long unbroken publishing history, there's a pop-up broadside that rolls off the photocopiers only as long as the editors' cash and energy allows. Both styles of magazine, and all the papers, fanzines, PDFs and web-pages in between, are interconnected parts of poetry's ecology.

Before you start to place your poems among them, give some thought to the sort of publication you want to appear in and why.

Do you want to be in a magazine with your friends as an adjunct to your poetic social life, or is there a gold standard of magazine acceptance that you've challenged yourself to achieve?

What do you want to happen to your poems after they have been published? Perhaps you've got your eye on future pamphlet or book publication - how might those editors look at your magazine publication record?

Do you want all your best poems out in the world through the magazine route, or do you want to hold some back?

What do you think about having a large number of your poems online, where notions of copyright can sometimes get a bit hazy?

Suitably informed, you can draw up a hit list of the magazines you'd like to approach. Start by reading the acknowledgements pages of books by poets you admire to see which magazines have published their work. Your published friends, creative writing workshop members and tutors can also be tapped for advice.

If you can get to London, Morpeth or Edinburgh, visit

- the Poetry Library in the Royal Festival Hall, <http://www.poetrylibrary.org.uk/>
- the Northern Poetry Library <http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=1669>
- the Scottish Poetry Library <http://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/>

to browse their print magazine collections; or see if you can find one of the vanishing small number of bookshops which stock poetry magazines.

The Poetry Library's website has a list of both print and online mags, and its project to digitise print magazines (<http://www.poetrymagazines.org.uk/>) allows online visitors a closer look between the covers of certain publications.

Look to get a sense of each magazine's style and whether or not your work would be a good fit for it. Mailing your carefully wrought sequence of formal nature poems to a journal that publishes poems with a fierce experimental agenda, or vice versa, only benefits the Post Office. Each magazine will have its own idiosyncratic submission guidelines which you need to stick to, but in general ...

More ideas to inspire your writing at www.poetryschool.com – download, online and face-to-face

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TEACHING THE ART OF POETRY

- Keep track of what you've sent, where and when. A bit of busy work with schedules and spreadsheets helps keep the submission process rolling, and can reduce the sting a bit when the inevitable rejections arrive. A neat cross in that particular poem's column, draw a line, move on to the next submission.
- Include up to 6 poems in any one submission, don't put more than one poem on each page, and put your name and contact details on each sheet of the document. Poems will get detached from their cover letters, printed-out emails will fall behind the coffee machine in even the most well run magazine offices. Don't make it easy for people to lose you.
- Format your poems plainly on white A4 paper with no crazy, colourful, massive or miniscule fonts.
- Include a brief introductory letter with only the sketchiest of biographies. If your poem is accepted, any longer supplementary details can be solicited from you later.
- If you're submitting by post, include a stamped addressed envelope big enough for the return of poems – A4 or A5, no smaller.
- If you're submitting by email, make sure you've read submission guidelines about whether poems should be in the body of the email or attached as single or multiple documents, and in what format.
- The question of simultaneous submissions. Yes, sending the same poems out to many mags at once means that you can scatter them widely to maximise your chances; yes, it cuts down on the frustration of magazines' lengthy decision making times, but editors really don't like it. For each issue of their magazine, they will be mulling over several piles of poems in various stages of possible rejection and acceptance; and their ultimate decisions will be based as much on how poems sit together as how they function individually. If their facilitated conversations of complementary poems break down when poems are withdrawn because they've been accepted elsewhere, they will be annoyed.
- Dealing with rejection - sigh, and move on to the next submission. Dealing with acceptance - whoop, and move on to the next submission.

Throughout this whole process, it's worth remembering that there are very few people who are making their livings from poetry magazine editing, most of them are doing it for love not money. To reciprocate is only polite. Buy copies of a few magazines while you're deciding where to submit, buy extra copies of magazines that do a good job of publishing your poem, subscribe to a different magazine each year if you can. Magazine readers and writers need each other equally!

Julia Bird is the Poetry School's Programme and Marketing Officer, and she also works as a freelance literature promoter. She is on the Board of Magma poetry magazine, and her second poetry collection is due out from Salt Publishing in 2013.

A version of this short download appeared in the [Poetry Society's](#) publication Poetry News in 2012.

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