LAMMERGEIER LIT MAG CRASH COURSE

Description: This document is a compilation of the *Lammergeier* Lit Mag Crash Course, a series of short articles intended as a resource for writers new to submitting to literary magazines. Visit lammergeier.org for the original series, and feel free to contact us @lammergeiermag on Twitter.

Contents

The Wildebeest & The Watchmaker: How to Know When it's Time to Submit

Hey, pals, Jacqueline here! Last week, we had a chance to talk about some resources that can help you decide where to send your work. But how do you know when work is ready? This week, I'll be spending a little time talking about two different trends I've noticed in writers/submitters, and how each approach can know when it's time to make the leap and start submitting.

If you're the tl;dr type, I can sum up what I'm about to say for you right here: **there's no magical right answer for when your work is ready to go out**. It's all a matter of figuring out what "ready" looks like to you.

Approach 1: The Wildebeest (AKA Draft Now, Revise Later)

Let me know if this sounds familiar: when you sit down to write, you hit the ground running, fall into some kind of weird fugue state, and emerge some number of hours later with a miraculously finished draft in front of you. The idea of revision makes you feel itchy, and you tend to need to let work sit for a long time before you're capable of returning to it with fresh eyes. In fact, you may feel some anxiety over the idea of not finishing a piece in one sitting because it's difficult to recapture the energy of a particular writing session, which can make returning to half-finished work a challenge, if not impossible.

I've been a Wildebeest writer my entire life. Part of it stems from poor time management skills, which were then reinforced by my career as a slam poet. For me, a poem was finished when it was said out loud and received a score, which meant that poems had to be completed in one sitting and were very rarely returned to after a slam event. It's taken me almost a decade to even begin to move away from this style of writing that, while stressful at times, feels authentic to the way that I create.

Because I'm not able to change the way that I write, I've had to change my expectations for the way that I submit. Anytime I send a packet out for the first time, it's comprised entirely of first drafts. I do this because I tend to feel increasingly less confident with poems as they go through repeated revisions over time. In order to make this okay for me, I've had to accept the fact that **three to five different versions of a poem may be out at different journals at any given time, and that the version that winds up in a journal may not be the final version of a piece.**

For example, here is a side-by-side comparison of the same poem three years apart. The first was published in *Split Lip*, while the second is a part of a manuscript sent to a publisher earlier this year.

Grey Whale: Lane County, 1970
For George Thornton

She molders. Shrouded in seabirds and the stink
of the sand. Dynamite, leeward heave-ho
tucked beneath her ribs, a jail for urchins.
He lights her fuse a quarter mile removed.
He hopes to deconstruct her, break her down
to chunks the gulls can scavenge. Carcass drawn,
she turns his mind toward beauty in the past tense,
toward checkmarks, toward skeletal shipwrecks.
When she erupts, it's not a metaphor,
but an interruption. Dusty red fingers
crack the sky. She opens. Whole, unmanaged,
thunderclap body quarter mile removed.
Her together parts have no care for big
ideas, only for not coming apart.
She scatters her own ashes, and even
frightened birds won't carry her away.

Grey Whale: Lane County, 1970
For George Thornton

She molders Shrouded in seabirds and stink
of sand Dynamite leeward heave-ho
shimmied between ribs a jail for urchins
He lights her fuse quarter mile removed.

And in the reckoning he hopes how slight the pieces
What manageable mouthfuls for gulls
Carcass drawn she turns his mind
toward beauty in the past tense
toward checkmarks
skeletal shipwrecks, with their spines that shiver
in the black

Her eruption then not so much metaphor
as clearing of throat A bloom of sand
to curl arthritic toward the sky
She opens Whole unmanaged
thunderclap quarter mile removed

What care does she have for big ideas
in the sinew of her together-parts
She scatters her own ashes presses her imprint
to the crush of a Volkswagen's hood and even
frightened birds won't carry her away

As you can see, the structure and syntax of the poem have changed quite a bit between the two versions of the poem (and it's still not finished, check that errant period in the 4th line!), but ultimately, the spirit of the piece is still the same. Frankly, I'm a better poet now than I was then, but it's my honest belief that if we wait to submit until we feel we've become our best selves, then we would never submit anything at all. If this manuscript is ever picked up (fingers crossed, amirite?), then *Split Lip* will still receive acknowledgment as the first place the piece appeared, though the piece has changed since.

In order to honor this method of creation and submission, as well as to keep from getting bogged down by my own insecurities, I keep drafts of every version of every poem I write, just in case I happen to take a step too far and revise all the good bits out of a piece. I also keep individual files of each packet I send out to each journal so that I can see which versions of pieces were sent to which journals.

Once I freed myself of the idea that being in a journal meant a piece had to be Capital-F Finished, it allowed me to send out work more frequently, which led to more frequent publication. In keeping with that, I would urge fellow Wildebeest writers to lean heavily on methods of organization that allow you to keep track of different drafts of pieces in their various states of "completeness." Doing this will help you keep that spirit of running and revision (if revision comes at all), while providing some order to the chaos of sending several different versions of pieces out into the world.

Approach 2: The Watchmaker (AKA Slow & Steady)

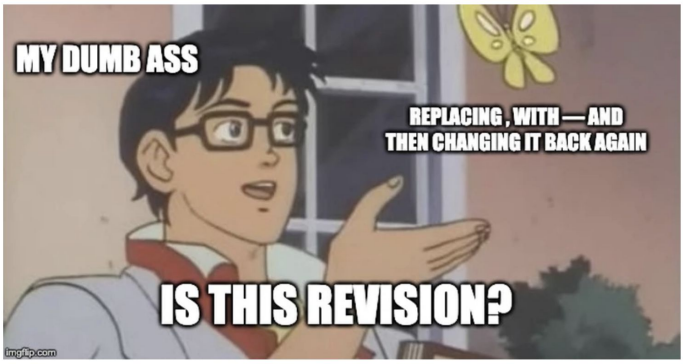
Maybe the idea of shooting different drafts out into the void doesn't work for you. Maybe you're the type of writer who prefers to plug away at a piece over a period of time, then tinker with revisions until a piece feels perfect. This is totally a valid way to engage with your writing, it just means you'll have to ask yourself a different set of questions, and work with a different set of expectations, when it comes time to send things to journals.

Writers who utilize the Watchmaker method may tend to produce work a bit more slowly, and frequent rounds of revision may lead to fewer submissions. While there's nothing wrong with that, if submitting your work for publication is a goal of yours, you might ask yourself a few questions in order to keep your work from languishing on your hard drive forever.

What does "finished" mean to you? For Watchmakers, it can be hard to answer this question; it may be that work isn't finished until it *feels* finished. But think hard—try to figure out what tends to have fallen into place in a piece for you when you get that feeling. Is the emotional resonance of the piece clicking into place? Is it something to do with the characters? Are things clicking at the sentence level? Once you know what tends to be the thing that sends the signal to your brain that a piece is finished, you can work that process into your writing goals in order to help you get to that place before you get stuck.

How many rounds of revision seems right? No two pieces are the same, and sometimes a piece will require more rounds of revision in order to click into place, but if you're someone who can get trapped into a never-ending cycle of tinkering, it may help to establish a ritual for how many times you revise a piece before sending it out (to journals or, if you feel more comfortable, to peers whose feedback you trust). Combine that with the knowledge of what a finished piece feels like to you, and make sure that one round of revision involves you reading for that particular thing.

Who do you trust to help you see if a piece is finished? Relying on a network of writers whose feedback you trust is crucial to any writer, but it can be especially helpful for Watchmakers to receive outside feedback from a group of trusted peers to keep from getting stuck in the loop of cosmetic edits.



NARRATOR: It wasn't.

If this sounds like you, try to have that "this will make the piece feel finished" quality in mind when you send it to your peers. People generally love having a little direction when they read a piece, especially if it will help them give you feedback that will actually be useful to you.

No matter what your process looks like, if you're a Watchmaker type, it may be helpful to set yourself some goals. For example, "I will revise this piece x number of times and then send it out." Those goals can be flexible, but if you know that you're the type of person who may use revision as an excuse not to submit, then having an endpoint might help keep you from getting stuck.

A Few Final Thoughts

Like I said before, there's no right answer for when it's time to start sending your work to journals, and whether you're a Wildebeest or a Watchmaker (I'm committing to this, let me have it), submitting will still come with its fair share of rejection. That sucks (and give Ashely's post this week a read to hear more thoughts on that), but it doesn't mean that you were wrong to send the piece out. What you decide to do with your work in response to a rejection is up to you, all that matters is that you keep writing, keep submitting, and keep trying.

Glossary of Literary Magazine Terms

This is a quick guide to some of the terms you may come across when submitting to a literary magazine. From SMF to first publication rights, we have you covered.

Author Bio—A brief paragraph describing the author. See our guides here and here for advice on how to create one.

First Publication Rights--This is a stipulation that basically gives a journal/press the right to be the first to publish you. The agreement with your work after that can vary (though most tend to release all rights back to you immediately to a few months). Most journals/presses want to be the first piece to publish it, which means they won't take reprints, even if they were self-published. If a piece is published in an anthology or a collection after another journal has required first publication rights, that means that they must be acknowledged as the place first appeared.

Genre—Category or type, usually in reference to the three most common forms of writing submitted to lit journals, namely fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction. However, *genre fiction* often refers to nonliterary writing that relies heavily on tropes, and usually fantastic or speculative work in particular (although most mysteries, romance novels, etc. also fall under it). It can also refer to science fiction and fantasy generally without commentary on literary value one way or another.

Masthead—The staff of a journal, which can typically be found linked to the front page of a journal's website. This is helpful for when you're submitting, so that you can address submissions to the appropriate genre editor. If all else fails, addressing submissions to the Editor-in-Chief is never a bad move.

MFA--This is something you'll probably see popping up in literary community. Long story short, an MFA stands for Master of Fine Arts and is (though this is changing a little) the terminal degree for creative writing. There's a lot of debate about the value of this degree. We won't get into this here, but just know it's a thing that exists.

Online vs Print--This has been a longstanding debate about what method of publication is "better". Answer, it really depends on what you're seeking. Historically, print publications have been seen as more prestigious, though online journals are a lot more accepted than they were just a few years ago. It's just something to be aware of when you consider publishing.

Simultaneous Submission—A submission to a literary journal sent while other journals are also considering some or all of the work from said submission, e.g. a set of poems sent to two different publications. Most journals accept simultaneous submissions, but a few don't, so keep an eye out. In the event that a publication accepts your simultaneous submission, you should accept it immediately. Postponing a response to an acceptance in hopes of getting another is considered rude and dishonest, and it can earn you a bad reputation.

Standard Manuscript Format (SMF)--As the name says, this is a standard formatting structure that some journals do. You don't see it too often in literary journals, but it's super prevalent in genre journals (think sci-fi/fantasy). This is a really good example of manuscript format: https://www.shunn.net/format/story.html

Deciding Where to Submit: A Step-by-Step Guide

If you're brand new to the submission game, congratulations! Up until now, writing has been a private endeavor, or one you've shared with your trusted friends, and you're ready to take the first step toward flinging your words into the void and hoping something comes back.

While there's no guide out there that can help take the weirdness out of waiting or the sting out of rejection, here are some tips that will help you submit more strategically and get your work out into the world.

Read Living Authors

Before we go any further, stop for a second and ask yourself: who are your favorite writers? Who are the writers you see your work as having been influenced by? Who are the writers whose work most excites you? If you're struggling with answers to these questions, or your answers to these questions are all people who aren't currently alive and working today, it might be worth trying to expand your circle a little more to figure out who you see as your writing peers.

You've probably heard the adage a million times: the best writers are good readers. That tip isn't just to help nurture your engagement with the creative world, it can also be really helpful in building a writing community, as well as figuring out where your work might be a good fit. Not only that, but it will help you to realize that, for the most part, authors are living, breathing people who get freaked out by rejections the same as you do.

Once you've figured out who your peers are, you can look to their publications to give yourself an idea where to start. If you have their books on your shelf, check out the acknowledgments page at the back and see where your favorite poems were published. If you don't have the books, author websites will also typically have the same information (and can sometimes be more helpful, since they'll typically link to online publications). Seeing where your peers and your favorites have published can give you a great jumping off point.

Try it with just one journal at first. Click around their most recent issue and see if you feel like what they're publishing matches your vibe. If it does, add it to your submissions list. Or, even if you don't find a journal, you may stumble on another living writer who's publishing work that's thematically similar to your favorite, giving you a chance to keep reading and growing.

Utilize Social Media

While many authors have chosen to sidestep social media altogether, it can be a valuable tool for connecting with other writers, and for finding opportunities. Once you've found a journal you think might be a good fit, try to scope out what their social media presence is like. Do they tend to hype up their authors? Do they seem excited about what they're doing? Does it feel like a place you'd feel comfortable trusting your work? Awesome! All the better.

In addition to connecting with journals in order to see calls for submissions, social media can also be great for getting word of mouth submissions from writer friends. For example: Ashely and I regularly share submission calls with one another because we've had enough time to get a sense of what the other is doing as an author. And because we're both Extremely Online™ in different spheres, we have the opportunity to see cool things for our friends that the other might miss.

You'll see us reiterating this a lot over the next month, but it can't be stressed enough: other writers are the best resource you have, and creating a community where you support one another is crucial. Setting aside the urge to be competitive or jealous can be tough (it's something I struggle a lot with and plan to address in our editorial roundtable later this month). But believe me when I say that none of us is getting rich on this thing, and it feels so much better to have a supportive community around you.

Make Sure You Have All the Tools

Okay, so you've found a list of journals, you've plucked up the courage. What do you need to actually do the damn thing? Here is a list of resources that will give you everything you need to make sure you're ready to send your work into the world

- **An Email Address -** Whether you decide to use a dedicated email address or the one you use for everything else, make sure that you're always sending work from the same email address so that all of your submission correspondence comes to the same place. I like the option of being able to step away when I need to, so I have a separate email address that's just for submissions, but I've heard other people have great luck using filters in gmail.
- **A Submittable Account -** While some journals (such as yours truly) operate through email or other submissions systems, Submittable is the largest submissions platform used in the lit world. Creating an account is free, and will also help organize submissions so that you can keep track of submission progress for work you send through the platform.
- **An Organization System -** This isn't a necessity so much as it's a tool for your peace of mind. Because you'll be submitting pieces across a variety of platforms and letting them sit for weeks or months, it's easy to forget what you sent where and when. Once a piece

has been accepted, you'll need to know where to send a withdrawal notice, so having an organization system in place is helpful. I prefer digital things, so I tend to work with a spreadsheet. Here's an example of that spreadsheet from a few years back (as well as an example of some very non-strategic submitting)

Hayden's Ferry Review	11/27/15	"Radioactive," "Videogames," "Gage," "Anxiety," "Batman"	Submittable	N	FR (2/1)
Indiana Review	11/27/15	"Radioactive," "Videogames," "Gage," "Anxiety," "Batman"	Submittable	N	FR (2/1)
Black Warrior Review	11/27/15	"Radioactive," "Videogames," "Gage," "Anxiety," "Batman"	Submittable	N	FR (2/1)
Redivider	12/10/15	"Radioactive," "SSRI," "Anxiety"	Submittable	N	FR (2/3)
Heavy Feather Review	12/10/15	"Radioactive," "SSRI," "Anxiety"	Submittable	N	ACCEPTED "RADIOACTIVE" (2/17)
Poetry	12/10/15	"Radioactive," "SSRI," "Anxiety"	Submittable	N	
Okey-Panky	2/2/16	"Radioactive," "SSRI," "Anxiety"	Submittable	N	FR (3/12)
Okey-Panky	2/2/16	"Extras"	Submittable	N	FR (3/12)
West Branch	2/9/16	"Radioactive," "SSRI," "Anxiety"	Online	N	FR (2/17)
Copper Nickel	2/9/16	"Radioactive," "SSRI," "Anxiety"	Online	N	FR probably?
Southern Indiana Review	2/9/16	"Radioactive," "SSRI," "Anxiety"	Submittable	N	FR
Slice	2/9/16	"Radioactive," "SSRI," "Anxiety" "Video Games"	Submittable	N	FR (5/9)
Potomac Review	2/9/16	"Radioactive," "SSRI," "Anxiety" "Video Games"	Submittable	N	ACCEPTED "SSRI" (5/22)
Denver Quarterly	2/17/16	"Transorbital," "Stillbirth," "Gage," "Orgonomy,"	Submittable	N	
Cream City Review	2/17/16	"Transorbital," "Stillbirth," "Gage," "Orgonomy,"	Online	N	FR (6/9)

Columns (From Left): Journal, Date Submitted, Poems Submitted, Submission Platform, Fee, Response (FR: form rejection; PR: personal rejection)

This was from a period where I was still learning how to submit, so I tended to submit in spurts without a ton of strategy.

Decide On a System That Works For You

Once you know where you want to submit and you have all the tools to do it, it can help to establish a rhythm for yourself that makes submitting feel strategic without getting too emotionally taxing. We'll talk about this more later, but it's important to remember: you'll be facing a lot of rejection at every stage, so it's important to submit in a way that's healthy for you, and to step away if you need to.

Right now, I'm in a period where I'm not submitting as much, which is what's right for me (and totally cool if it's what's right for you!), but the strategy I've always employed is that for every

rejection I receive, I'll send a packet out to three more places, no more or less. That helps me stay strategic with my submitting, and it helps me from falling into the trap of not submitting at all, and then overwhelming myself by submitting to 20 places in one afternoon.

Finally, Some More Submission Resources

Writing, like everything, is a passion that has barriers to entry at all levels. If you're in a place where you can and want to pay for services or submission fees, that's awesome! But for the purposes of this guide, we'll be focusing strictly on free resources (if you have questions about more resources with a cost attached, shoot us a tweet or an email!).

Entropy's Where to Submit: Published quarterly, Entropy magazine's "Where to Submit" list is an invaluable resource for people looking to find new places to send their work. The list contains open calls for full-length manuscripts, chapbooks, journals, and fellowships, all broken down by genre, deadline, and whether there is a cost attached.

Trish Hopkinson: Trish is another wildly knowledgeable resource who has spent time compiling resources on where to submit your work. She's especially great at highlighting paid work for poets, and fee-free calls for submissions, both of which can be a relatively rare find. She also does exceptional interviews with editors of magazines, which can be a great resource to help you decide if your work is a good fit.

The Review Review: While *The Review Review*'s bread and butter is reviewing literary magazines, their interview section is another great place to read interviews with editors to see if their magazine is a good fit for your work.

Isabel Rae McKenzie's Lit Mag List: A recent addition, Isabelle Rae McKenzie (@birdpoems) compiled a list of lit mags that weren't run by able-bodied cishet white men and who actively sought work from people who are also not able-bodied cishet white men.

To Wrap Up

Hopefully this has helped finding places to send your work feel a little less intimidating. If you have questions or feedback, please tweet us @lammergeiermag, or send us an email! Otherwise, make sure to check out Ethan's submission etiquette and Ashely's cover letter intro.

Happy hunting, and we'll see you next week!

-Jacqueline

How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Literary Journal Cover Letter

Hello Flock!

As part of our series on submitting in the lit journal world, your friendly neighborhood nonfiction editor, Ashely Adams, is going to talk to you about cover letters! In my experience, this is something that gives newcomers to the literary journal field a lot of anxiety, probably because the only common interaction we get with cover letters is those meaty beasts we send in with job applications. Well, as it turns out, cover letters for literary journals are not quite so demanding (in fact, it's strongly advised you do not type out a full page, single-space spread about your work ethic, company loyalty, and problem-solving skills). That said, what should a cover letter for lit journal submissions look like?

Below is one of my personal cover letters. I've found this format, or something close to it, generally works for most places. That said, make sure to consult the journal's guidelines, as they may ask for specific information, such as requesting no cover letter, etc. As a caveat, nothing said here guarantees an acceptance, and a lot of places will forgive small mistakes for a strong submission, but starting off on a good foot can help build a positive future relationship with a journal!

*Dear Kolleen Carney Hoepfner and Joey Gould,**(1)***

Thank you for considering the attached poems, "Theia", "The Rings of Saturn", "Venera 4", and "Coronal Mass Ejection," for publication at Drunk Monkeys. ***(2),(3)***

Here is a short bio:

Ashely Adams is an MFA candidate in nonfiction at the University of South Florida. Her work has appeared in Heavy Feather Review, Fourth River, Permafrost, OCCULUM, Luna Luna Magazine and others. She really likes space. ***(4)***

These pieces are a simultaneous submission. If accepted somewhere else, I will withdraw it immediately. ***(5)***

Thank you once again for your consideration.
Sincerely, Ashely Adams

Further Notes:

1. When at all possible, make sure you address an actual person. The best thing is if you can find the editor(s) for the genre you're submitting to. Sometimes, especially at big journals run out of academic institutions, you may only find an editor-in-chief and/or managing editor. It's totally fine to address them, although I personally like to make a little note like "So-and-so and the Journal's Team" to acknowledge the reading staff working through the slush at the big journals. Your submission probably won't get dumped if it just says "Dear Editors," but the few minutes it takes to find a name will be much appreciated. The only thing I would not to do (besides putting a wrong name and/or misspellings) is "Sirs or Madams" because it's exclusionary to nonbinary people and pretty dated overall.

2. This is a poetry cover letter, but it's pretty close to what I use for prose with the genre swiped out.

3. You don't want to be overly familiar, but before the bio is a good space if you have some sort of personal statement you want to give the editors. For example, I've thanked a journal for a nice meeting at AWP or if I really enjoyed a piece they published. If you do this, keep it brief, no more than a sentence or two.

4. The bio should be pretty short and focus on your major publications and relevant professional experience. Now, what do you do if you're just start out and have few publications, if any at all? In this case, your professional experience might be what you focus on. It's also okay to say something along the lines of "this would be my first publication". Again, just keep it short and relevant!

5. Most lit journals take simultaneous submissions these days. Some places will ask you to signal that so they know that if it's something they want, they should accept it sooner rather than later. Check the journal's simultaneous submission policy to be safe. (For example, journals focusing on speculative fiction tend to not accept them.)

An Editor's Guide to the Do's and Don'ts of Literary Journal Cover Letters

Part of what makes cover letters so daunting is that no one tells you what editors expect from them. Writers do their best to figure out what works from past experience and hearsay, but there are few guides on the subject compared to what you can find on professional cover letters. To help dispel some common misconceptions about lit journal cover letters and author bios, fiction Ethan Brightbill is here to share his insights on the subject after ten years working for lit journals including *Passages North*, *Literary Orphans*, *Lake Effect*, and more.

Ethan Brightbill: The most important thing to remember when writing a cover letter is that the editor who looks at yours has likely already read half a dozen others just in that same day, and while you want your letter to stand out, it's even more important not to waste the editor's time. A cover letter will never make or break an acceptance for your piece, but it can show editors that you take their journal and your own work seriously, or it can bore them with needless details. The list below will help you do the former and avoid the latter.

Do address your letter to a specific person, usually the genre editor. It shows that you care enough about the journal to at least look at their web page.

Do keep things as brief and concise as possible; remember, the editor reading your cover letter might read a dozen others in one day alone. Barring unusual circumstances, your cover letter sans author bio should be one or two brief paragraphs. The bio itself should be another paragraph written in third person.

Don't use your cover letter to summarize your work. The editor will know what your piece is about once they've read it, and repeating that information in advance just bloats the cover letter. If there's something you're worried the editor(s) won't understand without you mentioning it, then you should go back and revise your work so that it stands on its own. This also goes for what inspired or influenced your writing. While your creative process is understandably significant to you, it isn't relevant information to the editorial staff.

Do mention what you like about the journal. It shows you care enough to read their work, and while it won't change a rejection into an acceptance, it does encourage the editor(s) to match the attention you gave their publication. A sentence at the start of the cover letter is perfect.

Don't include biographical information in your cover letter. That's what the bio is for. It's not a big deal if you include one or two details, but ask yourself if the editors really need to know about your passion for exotic fruit smoothies.

Do mention whether or not this is a simultaneous submission. Many mainstream literary journals will assume as much, but some ask that you inform them if this is the case. If you make

it a habit, it's one less thing to worry about, and it does let the editor(s) know that your work could be accepted elsewhere. Be sure to keep an eye out for journals that don't accept simultaneous submissions as well. They're rare, but they exist.

Do feel free to admit if this is be your first publication. It's not required, but it will explain why you don't have past pubs, and most editors recognize that we all have to begin somewhere. Speaking of which…

Don't lie about your publishing history in your bio. While a string of big names in your author bio might get an editor's hopes up briefly, it won't change whether or not they wish to publish your work once they've read it. Because of the subjective nature of writing and the vast number of submissions lit journals receive, editors must routinely turn down submissions by writers with great credentials. Lying about your own won't get you ahead, but it might get you blacklisted if anyone cares to do a five second search for your work.

Don't think that you need to name every place that's ever published your work in your bio. If you only have a few past pubs, by all means, mention all of them, but as you become more established as a writer, consider limiting the list to the most recent or prestigious lit journals that have taken your work. (If the journal you're submitting to has expressed interest in another place where you've been published, consider mentioning them as well.) A couple lines of publications is fine, but more than that just stretches your bio without adding significant information for editors and readers.

Don't feel like you need to mention your education. While having an MFA or other degree at least shows that you're willing to invest time in writing, it won't get you more acceptances, and the absence of one won't hurt you. Many successful authors don't mention degrees even if they do have them, so frankly, it may not even matter.

Do understand that as deadening as making up cover letters can sometimes be, editors appreciate the time you spend creating them, and they recognize when you try to make their (typically unpaid) jobs easier. Editors are usually writers themselves, and they're just as eager to be amazed by great writing as you are to give it to them. Recognize that the people reading your work are hoping you'll succeed, and keep writing.

Mistakes in Submitting

This week, our editors discuss the mistakes they've made while submitting, and how others can avoid them.

Ashely: So one thing I wouldn't say is necessarily a mistake but a big change is in the length of my cover letter. When I was first starting out in submitting, my cover letter was much longer than the one that I use now. I really believed that it would make or break a submission if it wasn't the bestest cover letter ever. Now, I know that cover letters are important, but don't need my life story (and really shouldn't).

My biggest mistakes are the fault of my own memory. When I was starting out I misspelled names or mixed up names. I tend to submit a lot at one time and I would mess up. First thing, it happens, so don't worry about it like killing your career. But, do slow down and make sure you've got the right names and people, especially if you're someone who submits a lot. Double check before sending out.

Really, the worst thing that happens with small mistakes like that is that you'll get rejected, which sucks, but are usually forgiven, in my understanding.

Jacque: When I was first getting started submitting, I made the mistake that a lot of new submitters make, which is not being familiar with the journals I sent out. The very first place I submitted was a legacy journal (I'm a poet, so even without looking, I can say it was probably *Rattle*), that I didn't submit to because I wanted to be published there, but because I knew Anis Mojgani had been published there, which meant that I wanted to be too. As I've grown as a poet, I've tried to shift my work and where I submit to journals that I actually enjoy reading, and I've found my work in amazing company as a result.

Another mistake that I made early in my writing career was categorizing publications based on tiers. These invisible barriers (print over online, university over independent, etc.) allowed me to mistake a journal's longevity for desirability, which took a lot of the joy out of submitting, made me competitive, and led to a lot of disappointment. Since then, I've discovered the joy of working with smaller journals who are genuinely excited about my work (and also, in my experience, very savvy when it comes to sharing and promoting their authors). When I think about where to send my work now, it's based on where I would be proud to have my work appear, where I feel like I'll be treated kindly by the editorial staff and fellow contributors. Do I still have dream journals? Of course! But now, my career doesn't hang on those journals in quite the same way.

Ethan: Lack of familiarity with the publications I was submitting to was definitely my biggest mistake, too. One of the first nationwide lit journals I ever submitted to was the University of Pittsburgh's *Hot Metal Bridge*, and the piece in question was this weird fantasy horror short

story. Even if it weren't for the quality of the piece (and hoo boy, was it a bad story), that was never going to be the right venue for something like that.

I also assumed that online journals were far below print journals in terms of desirability, which isn't true at all. Sure, print magazines have traditionally had more prestige, but online journals are much more readily available to readers. I don't have statistics to back me up on this, but I expect that more people overall read online magazines compared to print. (I certainly do.) And if sharing your work with the world is the ultimate point of publishing, then online journals are arguably a better means of accomplishing that. I'm not against print journals by any means, but I don't focus on them, either.

No matter what you do, you're going to make some cringeworthy mistakes when you begin submitting your work. The key is just to be aware of your own ignorance and educate yourself as much as you can, both before and after you submit.

Everybody Hurts (But Mostly Me When You Reject My Submission): A Rejection Survival Guide

Ashely here again with another piece for our submission guide. By this point, you've figured out where to submit, gathered all your material together, and penned a killer cover letter. You've sent off your piece, waiting and waiting with anticipation until you get that notification in your email. However, when you open up the response, you find your piece has been rejected.

This, unfortunately, is an extremely common result for submissions. Any writer who has been submitting for some time will tell you of the mountains of rejections they've accumulated. Here are my personal rejections.

carnival music plays

Even so, it's not unusual to find yourself asking: Why did this piece get rejected? As an editor/reader at a few publications, here are some of the main reasons a piece might get rejected.

Editor Preference: This is a common reason and perhaps the most frustrating one as a writer, as it's one you can't really do anything to rectify. Your piece could be perfect, but maybe it just didn't click with the editor. Keep in mind that if the journal has a big team, it may not be a universal rejection. I've sat in on some heated debates over a piece that ultimately got passed on because there wasn't a majority for publishing it even though it had some defenders. It could be argued that this is really the umbrella reason things get rejected, but we'll follow up with some of the more "concrete" reasons a piece could be rejected.

Technical Issues: Another reason a piece may have been rejected is because there were flaws in the writing itself. Again, this can be very subjective, but if the editor struggles to get through the piece because of narrative issues, pacing, organization, or syntax errors, it will probably be passed on.

Did Not Meet Guidelines: Sometimes a piece may get rejected because it did not follow the rules for publication. Perhaps the issue or journal had a certain theme the writing didn't meet. (This happened a lot when I was an editor for *Saw Palm*, a journal focused on Florida writing.) Perhaps it was over the word-limit. Some places (and especially contests) ask for blind submissions with no identifying information, but maybe the name was left in. Is it too early to remind everyone to read the guidelines?

Similar Content to Previous Publications: This reason isn't as common, but it pops up often enough that it's worth mentioning. You have an excellent poem about bees that a journal would normally be happy to accept. However, this journal has already published two bee poems in the last 6 months. For this reason, they may pass on the piece so as not to be completely saturated in bee poems.

Offensive or Harmful Content: I suspect this is a rare reason for rejection, but it's worth addressing. No one is saying a piece shouldn't deal with traumatic events or oppression in the world, but your the writing actively seeks to harm marginalized identities or glorify abuse and violence, then it will likely be rejected and you may even be blacklisted by the publication.

So, these are some of the reasons your piece may have been rejected. What can you do about it?

Keep Submitting: Remember that whole editor preference thing? Like I said, this is probably the most likely reason you've been rejected. The fact of the matter is most pieces will get rejected multiple times before acceptance.

Revisit and Edit the Piece: There's no easy rule that says "get X number or rejections before considering revising," but at some point, this maybe something to consider. One thing that you can use to guide potential revisions is personal rejections. For most literary journals, rejections are either considered form rejections (general language used in most rejections) or personal rejections (rejection with specific feedback to the writer). Sometimes, personal rejection may brush upon issues with the piece. In addition, make sure your writing is free of technical errors as much as possible.

Strong First Page: For longer works, many editors will stop reading and reject if they are not grabbed by the first page, especially at places that get a lot of submissions. Obviously, that doesn't mean you can slack on the rest of the piece, but remember that a first page can make or break a piece.

Don't Be a Jerk: This should go without saying, but if you get a rejection, don't fight with the editors about it. This won't change their mind, but it will probably get you banned from

submitting in the future and give you a bad reputation with other publications. (The editing world is surprisingly small).

Feel Sad if You Want: Even with this knowledge, you may find yourself feeling sad about a rejection. Sometimes you can jump right into submitting. Other times, you may want to sit out for a bit and work on something else. Give yourself the space you need, but try to remember rejection does not mean failure as a writer.

We hope this list gives you a little insight into why your writing may have been rejected. If all else fails, we've heard looking at baby vultures takes the sting out of rejection.

Editorial Roundtable

Well, pals, this is it! We're capping off our monthlong Lit Mag Crash Course with some advice from our editors, and a peek behind the curtain at what the editorial process looks like for *Lammergeier*. Hopefully this will answer the last of your nagging questions and make you feel brave enough to submit before we close at the end of the month!

What does the typical process of reading submissions look like for you? Walk us through a typical submission.

Jacque: For poetry, I'll typically batch read submissions at a time where I know that I have a good few hours to dedicate to it without being distracted. I'll read through submissions in the order I receive them, then separate them out into respective categories. Submissions that I know right away aren't a good fit for the magazine will go in a folder, and submissions that I'm either excited or on the fence about will be starred to get a second opinion from another editor. When we have time to get together, we'll talk about our respective thoughts on the piece, then decide whether we should accept it or give it a personal rejection. If it's the latter, I'll draft the personal rejection (usually a list of things that struck me about the piece) while it's still fresh in my mind.

Ethan: Mine is pretty similar. Batch read, start from the earliest submissions, move submissions that I'm confident aren't a good fit into a separate folder. I keep stories I'm on the fence or hopeful about in the queue until the next time I go through the queue, or even a third time. I might even call in Ashely if I'm torn and need a second opinion. Once I know I want a story, however, I send out the acceptance ASAP.

I then do rejections in separate batch runs, during which I reread the first paragraph or more of each story to make sure I'm confident in my vote. While I use a form message for standard rejections, positive rejections are usually written from scratch, so they take more time. If a fiction rejection takes a while to reach an author, it may be because I was busy, but it could also be because I was intrigued by their work and needed to mull it over. That's always, always the case if I send a positive rejection.

Ashely: I think my process is a little different in that nonfiction/hybrid doesn't tend to get nearly as much as poetry and fiction. (There's a peek behind the curtain, nonfiction tends to get the least amount of submission at journals unless it's kind of specialized for nonfiction). I tend to do acceptances and rejections at the same time in bursts of when I have free time. I will consult with other editors if I'm on the fence about a piece. Honestly, this is my favorite part of editing, when I get to talk it over with someone else and discuss what is working or what isn't. A thing to note is that I've probably, by percentage, had the most solicited work. This doesn't change the process too much, though there can be more a bit more back and forth about edits

before coming to a final decision. That said, solicitation doesn't necessarily guarantee acceptance or that your work will be automatically accepted without edits. Also, please submit more nonfiction to me.

How quickly into a submission do you typically know whether you want to keep reading?

Jacque: I'll typically know pretty quickly whether a poem isn't a good fit, and the biggest sign that a piece is compelling is if I want to read all the way through to the end. Because poetry is so short, and there are multiple pieces in a packet, it's important to make sure that I'm reading each piece in a packet as though it's a fresh piece of work. Sometimes the first piece in the packet isn't the strongest, and there are some real gems hiding in the middle.

Ethan: Sometimes I know almost right away, especially with language-driven pieces that show their intricacy with each sentence, but usually it takes me a bit. Sometimes I'll find myself thinking about a piece even after I've read it, worrying over what makes it tick and what its flaws might be. There was one piece we've published that I was originally hesitant about, but I couldn't get some of the language out of my head, and as I reread it again and again, I realized there was far more under the hood than meets the eye. If I can't escape a story even days after I read it, it's almost certainly a keeper.

Ashely: Like Jacque, I usually know if I'm going to pass on a piece pretty quickly, within the first page (or first few lines if it's a micro/flash). The method I employ for long pieces is to read the first page or two, and if my attention isn't captured, then skip to the end to see if the ending offers anything surprising or compelling. If that's the case, I may revisit and see if it's possible to suggest edits. That's one of the interesting parts of editing, when you decide to edit and how much. I want to strike the balance between making the piece stronger but respecting the integrity of the writer's voice and intentions.

What are some things that can turn a submission into an instant no for you?

Ethan: Beyond the stuff mentioned on our About page like writing that promotes bigotry, I don't know if anything is an instant 'no' for me. Even when an author makes what looks like a bad choice, I hope a good reason for it will become apparent. I can think of a few things that rarely end well: a story that's mostly dialogue, an overabundance of swearing (it happens a lot in stories that try too hard to be edgy), and especially poorly crafted sentences. Not every character or narrator is going to use sentences with an obvious beauty, but even seemingly crude sentences can have a rhythm and flow to them, and if that isn't there, the piece isn't a fit for us.

Ashely: Like Ethan, I'm not interested in outright bigoted content. Another thing that turns me off is appropriation of victims and marginalized people's stories, especially with the intention of profit. That isn't to say I think people shouldn't write outside of their experiences or about others, but I think people who write creative nonfiction (and really any genre) need to ask

themselves, "Why are you writing about these people?" So yeah, I'm probably not going to take a story about how a narrator worked with some disenfranchised group and really learned a lot about love and life or whatever.

It's not an instant no, but I do get annoyed when non-human organisms are reduced to a metaphor and a reader doesn't really care or do research. Respect your subjects of exploration.

Jacque: Stepping beyond the language and content issues that Ashely and Ethan discussed, a lot of the things that will turn me off about a piece have to do with the power dynamics between the speaker and the subject. For example: there's a subgenre of poetry that deals heavily in speaking about women in a certain way that's hard for me to get on board with. It typically has a lot to do with flattening images of women into their breasts (pendulous and matronly or pert and straining, always a hypothetical savior for a male speaker) over a cigarette and a whiskey. Even stepping beyond the misogyny that's at play in those pieces, there's very little about them that I find compelling or new, which makes them a hard sell for the magazine.

How many people are involved in rejecting or accepting submissions?

Jacque: Usually two.

Ethan: Just me for standard rejections, but sometimes two or even three for positive rejections and acceptances.

Ashely: It depends! A lot of times it'll just be me, but I've definitely had my other editors step in to help me make a decision.

How many times should you submit to a journal before deciding they're just not interested in your work? How often should you submit a piece before editing it or stop submitting it altogether?

Jacque: There are journals I've been sending work to once per submission period for five years now, and I'm not showing any signs of slowing down. This is important, because statistically speaking, women are less likely to resubmit to a magazine after having been rejected (for what it's worth, Kelli Russell Agodon wrote some great advice about this). If you care about being published someplace, keep trying. Also, I know I mentioned in The Wildebeest and the Watchmaker that I've got versions of poems floating around hither and yon, so I'm probably not the best person to give advice about when it's time to edit before resubmitting.

Ethan: Yeah, I don't think there's a magic number. If you get a few rejections from a publication, it may be worth a closer inspection the magazine in question to make sure you're submitting work they might be interested in. However, it could also be that your work isn't quite up to where they want it, or there could be outside factors influencing the editors'

decisions, or maybe your piece was solid but just didn't click. The point is that while multiple rejections from one place should make you consider if your work is a good fit for a publication, that doesn't mean you need to stop submitting by any means. Personally, I don't care how many times someone submits to *Lammergeier* as long as they take the time to familiarize themselves with what we do.

As for when to resume edits, I don't think there's a hard rule to follow for the first. Sometimes great work receive dozens of rejections before being accepted, but other times, edits really can make a difference. I'd say ten rejections isn't unusual, but if you haven't reread the piece recently, I'd at least do that much then, and if it seems like it needs edits, get to it.
Finally, I'd say the time to stop submitting a piece is when you no longer feel it represents your capabilities as a writer. Generally speaking, an author's writing usually improves with time, so there is a point where it makes more sense to focus on your stronger current work than the stuff you wrote years ago.

Ashely: I think I'm in agreement with the others when I say there's lots of variables. One real life example for me where I submitted multiple times to a journal—I've been submitting to *Cotton Xenomorph* since they started, got a few rejections and then finally got accepted. So, it happens! And there's definitely journals I've been submitting to I haven't heard back from yet, but just think are cool and I want my work there. On the other hand, I've had lots of times where I submitted to a place once and never did again for whatever reason. As an editor, I definitely don't mind at all if someone we rejected on good terms decides to submit again. People grow and change as writers. Some writers write in lots of different styles depending on genre and the piece. I can't say what the next submission from a person may be like!

As for when to revise, again, it's kind of up to you. There are pieces I will submit and can definitely feel there may need to be some more work. There are some pieces I think are largely where they need to be and will keep submitting until they get an acceptance. I would say if you're unsure, submit a few times before doing major revisions, just because accumulating some rejections even on a polished piece isn't unusual.

If you could give any one piece of advice to submitters who want to be published in *Lammergeier*, what would it be?

Jacque: The thing that excites me the most, THE MOST, in poems is beauty and weirdness at the line level. I'll take that over a cohesive narrative any day of the week. In fact, I'm happy to go with you on a ride and not totally know where I'm going. As long as the imagery that gets me there is good, and I'm given just enough pieces of the puzzle to keep me interested, I'll follow you just about anywhere.

Ethan: I feel the same way. Send me a poem that's successfully disguised itself as fiction, and I'll be very happy. The thing about a language-driven story is that it shows the writer knows what they're doing right from the beginning. And while it's true that fiction requires strong

characters and plot to function, well-wrought sentences can take any narrative and make it better.

Ashely: Like Jacque and Ethan, I love experimentation! Nonfiction is a weird genre that everyone defines by what it's "not," so there's a lot of room to play. I also love when I can tell someone is really passionate about what they talk about and have done a lot of research. It definitely shows in the work.

What's one thing you wish that people knew about the editorial/submission process?

Jacque: If an editor sends you a personalized rejection, or even asks you to send more, they mean it! Typically, I send out 4-5 personal rejections per issue, and it's always to people whose work I loved but couldn't quite find a place for. As soon as I do, I'm always thinking "man, I hope they send more, because that was rad." This goes along with the idea of resubmitting to a journal. If I sent you a personal rejection, then chances are I'm crossing my fingers that you'll send me something stellar for the next issue, so a quick turnaround is always welcome. Editors everywhere I've worked have expressed similar feelings.

Ethan: Just because it's a form rejection doesn't mean the words in it aren't sincere. I spent a lot of time perfecting our standard fiction rejection so that it would convey what I genuinely want a writer to know when we decline their work. Unless the author wrote something blatantly gross or that's an obviously poor fit for the magazine, I do appreciate the effort they spent on writing and submitting their story, and I hope they do find success in the future, either with that piece or another one, at *Lammergeier* or elsewhere. I think I speak for a lot of editors when I say I am always hoping to be amazed when I read a story, and I don't hold it against the author when that doesn't work out for me.

Ashely: Don't be scared of the process. It seems like a lot starting out, but once you make a habit of it, it gets pretty easy! A lot of editors are also writers and know the struggle, and I imagine very few of them go into a piece looking for something to hate. I think it's also good to remember that the worst thing that will happen most of the time during the submission process is an editor will go "Not for me" and pass on it.

This concludes our Lit Mag Crash Course! We hope that this resource has been helpful for you as you begin to navigate the waters of submitting your work for publication. If there were questions that we missed, fear not! We're still available via email and @LammergeierMag, and we're here to help.