



FAQs on Submissions

by
Julie H. Ferguson

Freelance writer and author of two non-fiction books, Vancouver-based Julie H. Ferguson leads workshops for writers' conferences and groups, as well as a community college, that provide writers with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to approach publishers with their work. For more information, contact Beacon Literary Services at info@beaconlit.com and visit her website at www.beaconlit.com.

Submission rules are one of the most frequent areas of inquiry that I deal with in my workshops and via email, with manuscript formatting running a close second. The reason behind all the questions is the variety of answers that writers receive from editors – there are almost as many permutations as there are models of cars.

The **golden rule** is first review the publication's or publishing house's website for their submission guidelines. Then, if you're still unsure of how they prefer to receive ideas, phone the receptionist and ask. Writers need to be certain that the receiving editor will accept electronic queries and manuscripts before using that method. Remember too that the text of an e-query is identical to that of a mailed query. Stay formal and professional. (Book proposals are never sent via email, only by snail mail.)

MAGAZINES: Over 90% of all print magazines are happy to receive queries and article manuscripts electronically and all ezine editors will. Turn your email program format to "plain text" and paste the query letter or manuscript into the body of the email. Editors delete anything with attachments these days because it is the attachments that transmit computer viruses.

If your query letter to a magazine has a one page bio as well, simply paste the bio into the email below the letter. A sidebar to a magazine article is treated the same way when submitting the ms electronically.

BOOKS: Most print publishers now accept queries for novels and non-fiction books via email – but you must make sure. Follow the rules above – use 'plain text' and put your TOC, if non-fiction, below the letter. Print book publishers do not accept manuscripts electronically – you must snail-mail a hard copy with a CD or floppy disks as indicated in your contract. Commercial e-publishers, usually have a facility on their websites that allow you to upload your ms to them.

Now a word about the subject line in emails – editors need good info in this field otherwise they will delete your message. Indicate that it is a query and the topic (or book category) or an article manuscript and the title. Here are some examples:

For magazines –

QUERY: infant asthma

MS: ‘Asthma Epidemic in Infants’

For books –

QUERY: Canadian naval history

QUERY: Mainstream romance

(the ms is not sent electronically.)

Follow these simple rules and you can’t go too far wrong. Most importantly, you signal to the editor that you know the business and are a professional.