



We're Pleased to Present the Handouts from:

"Formatting for Writing Success."

**Gerry Mandel, Faye Adams, and Mary Menke
Moderated by Rebecca Carron Wood**



July 15, 2010

Formatting Poetry and Contest Entries

Faye Adams

We are writers. Writers read. Most of us are avid readers. We read the work of other writers. We read just about anything we can get our hands on, and every spare minute. Hopefully, we proofread our own work. There is one thing, I've noticed, we don't take the time to read carefully, and it's perhaps the most important thing for a writer to read.

I'm referring to submission guidelines. Every call for submissions includes guidelines for submitting. If we want our work to win awards and/or be published, we must follow the submission guidelines to the letter, or face the risk of having our manuscript pitched in the trash bin, without having been read by an editor.

If you are in the habit of sending your work to contests or publishers, then you are well acquainted with rejections, right? If you get a rejection like the one attached, be grateful. It means that someone has read your submission. Without proper format, that very likely will not happen.

Every contest has entry guidelines. Most writers make the mistake of not reading them. No speed reading allowed here. Some contest guidelines include this statement:

"Any entry not following these guidelines will be eliminated."

Whether or not the entry guidelines include that statement, you can count on it as standard procedure. In most cases, your entry will be tossed without even being read.

There is such a thing as SMF. I once wrote an article on Standard Manuscript Format, titled, *Play the Game to Win*, in which I likened the entries to football players, bursting onto the playing field unprepared.

Play the Game to Win

S - M - F ! S - M - F ! S - M - F ! The cheering squad sprang into action at half-time, right arms raised as they shouted "S", left arms smacked across their chests for the "M" and legs scissoring during the high-jump on the "F". The cheer was repeated ad nauseam until I clamped hands over my ears.

"Where's the variety?" I grumbled.

"This is essential, if you want to win," said Coach.

The team began to spill single-file out of the dugout, their 8-1/2 X 11 bodies barely supported on #2 pencil legs. Their paper-clip arms dangled and eraser heads shook like bobble heads on the dash.

"Game time," yelled Coach.

The team for the second half was as unqualified as the first. One player supported himself with ink-pen legs. Another's body was covered in lines with three-hole punched edges. I cringed when I saw #3's name and address stamped under his nose. #4 actually wrapped himself in flowered paper. #5's body was full of single spaced lines, beginning at the very top of his head and running all the way through his toes. #6 paid no attention to margins, and #7 had no title. But the kicker was #8, with a "Dear Judge" letter attached to his front.

Listed in this introduction to the article are the most obvious ways you can guarantee that your contest entry will not qualify in any contest. But, contest guidelines vary. Contest sponsors have the option of making their own rules. We must read every word of the contest guidelines if we want a chance to win the prize.

For poetry, keep these standard ones in mind as you prepare your entries (Sample Copy Attached).

1. Regular 12 point font, in Times New Roman or Courier. Do NOT use bold or all caps.
2. Single space, unless otherwise specified.
3. Left margin justified (Always).
4. No illustrations.
5. Plain white paper.
6. No personal identification on entry.
7. Either a duplicate entry with personal information, or a cover letter, as specified in the guidelines.
8. Always send SASE (self addressed stamped envelope) for winners list.
9. Do not fold. Use large envelope (available at Wal-Mart).
10. Use correct postage. First ounce = 88 cents. Each additional ounce = 17 cents. You will need your own postal scale.

It is important to enter *before* the deadline date. Tom Howard says that your entry will have a better chance to win if you enter as early as possible. You want your entry to be passed on to the judge. If the entry coordinator likes your poem, it will be. If a panel of judges is considering the entries, you want yours to be one of the first ones passed around.

Last, but not least, don't forget to send the entry fee.

Many writers feel that if they can make their entry different, make it stand out, they will have a better chance of winning. Actually, the opposite is true. Stick to SMF to avoid having your entry tossed out of the running. Allow the poem to speak for itself, with no frills. The words of your poem should give you the best chance to win the prize.

If you've received a rejection letter, count your blessings. That means the editor or judge actually read your work. The sample included has an extra word, which means that the sender of the email did not proofread her email. Keep that in mind when sending email queries or entries. Mary tells you more about proofreading, which is all important.

SAMPLE REJECTION:

Dear Friend,

Thank you for your recent submission to our Living Lessons anthology. We received hundreds of wonderful submissions. It made our final selection process was more challenging than we anticipated. Unfortunately, we have decided not to include your submission.

Please do not take this notification as a poor reflection on you or your work. We simply could not fit them all into the book. **I hope you will submit to future anthologies.** Aside from our website, you can get the latest information about Whispering Angel Books by following us on Twitter, Facebook and our blog.

Thank you once again, and good luck in your future writing endeavors.

Very truly yours,
Lynn C. Johnston
Editor, Living Lessons

Twitter: [whisperangelbks](#)

Blog: <http://blog.whisperingangelbooks.com> <<http://blog.whisperingangelbooks.com/>>

Facebook: Search Whispering Angel Books for our fan page.

SAMPLE POEM, CONTEST READY:

Citrus Delight

Absentmindedly, I placed
the slice of orange
in my mouth.

As my teeth penetrated
the thin outer skin
the flavor burst on my senses
like fourth of July sparklers.

I closed my eyes
to savor the moment.

Slowly, I chewed
as the sweet, tangy
juice filled my mouth
and ran down my chin.

Greedily, I ate
but could not recapture
the utter delight
of that very first
bite.

Every Writer Needs an Editor/Proofreader!

What's the difference between a proofreader and an editor?

1. Proofread after each day's work
2. At the end of the manuscript, wait a day or longer before you proofread
3. Always run Spell Check, but don't rely on it! (See attached "Ode to Spell Check")
 - a. Double-check homonyms (there, their, they're; it's, its; your; you're)
 - b. Double-check words you're not sure of: (definitely, defiantly; eminent, imminent)
4. Print your manuscript; don't try to proofread on-screen
5. Go somewhere else to proofread
6. If time permits, read through entire manuscript without looking for errors
7. Read through again, marking mistakes (grammar, punctuation, spelling)
 - a. Also look for continuity errors, timeline errors, etc.
8. Read aloud
9. Read backwards (line by line)
10. When you've finished, have someone else proofread it
 - a. Look for same types of errors, including continuity, timeline, etc.

Don't make the mistake of thinking your story is so good that agents/publishers/readers will overlook any mistakes: **THEY WON'T!**

Ode to Spell Check

I have a spelling checker

It came with my PC

It plainly marks four my revue

Mistakes I cannot sea

I've run this poem threw it

I'm sure your pleased to no

Its letter perfect in it's weigh

My checker tolled me sew!

Standard Manuscript Format

1. Use a standard 12 pt. font: Times New Roman, Courier, Arial
2. Title page:
 - a. Upper left corner—name, address, phone number, email address
 - b. Upper right corner—approximate word count
 - i. The information in the corners should be single-spaced
 - c. Halfway down the page, center the title. Double-space and type “by”; Double-space again and type your name
3. Second page (the page after the title page):
 - a. Upper left corner—last name followed by a slash, then the title of the work
 - b. Upper right corner—the page number (2). Each subsequent page should be numbered the same way.
 - c. Halfway down the page, centered, chapter number and title
4. Remaining pages of manuscript must be double-spaced, with the first line of each paragraph indented five spaces.
 - a. One-to-one-and-a-half margins all the way around.
4. Print your manuscript on one side of the paper only.

Gerry Mandel pointed us all to a great website for information about formatting and submitting manuscripts:

<http://www.writing-world.com>

At the lecture, Gerry distributed an article from Writing World, but now you can go to the whole site!

Writing World also has a newsletter for which writers can sign up and get new information about writing on a regular basis.

Gerry recommends sending your work out looking its best, and keeping track of what you've sent.

After all, you don't want to send the same piece to the same editor again.

Gerry also spoke about what it's like to see your words being enacted on a stage.

If you'd like to have that feeling yourself, get writing on that script!

Resources for Writers

Rebecca C. Wood, Ph.D.

Writers Market

Print and on-line versions

This resource is often available at libraries as a reference book

Preditors and Editors

Resources for writers, as well as warnings about the bad guys

<http://pred-ed.com/>

Poets and Writers Magazine

Even if you don't subscribe, they have a great deadlines database that lists major contest deadlines from all over.

The Writer Magazine

Lots of interesting stories about the writing life.

Writers Digest Magazine

They host contests and publish writing books, too.

Libraries

Public libraries are chock full of books, including books about writing and marketing your work. Also, if you are trying to write for publication, you need to read, read, read, and where better to read for free?

St. Louis Writers Guild

The guild is made of writers of all genres, abilities, and publication levels. Come to events, including formal programs. Meet other writers and hear their success stories, as well as their fabulous failures.

Conferences

These are a great way to meet other writers, as well as to mingle with published writers, publishers, and agents. Mind your manners, though. Don't bug them in the bathroom! And go to all of the breakout sessions and agent pitches you can.

Colleges and Universities

Most local colleges and universities have writing classes, including creative writing. You can learn a lot, and meet new friends. Classes are especially helpful if you are just starting out as a writer. There is no maximum age for learning something new.

This is an incomplete list in no particular order of the colleges and universities in the St. Louis Metropolitan area.

Maryville University – <http://www.maryville.edu/>

St. Louis University – www.slu.edu

Webster University -- <http://www.webster.edu/>

Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville -- <http://www.siu.edu/>

Washington University – <http://www.wustl.edu/>

University of Missouri St. Louis -- <http://www.umsl.edu/>

There are some great community college resources:

St. Louis Community College – <http://www.stlcc.edu/>

Southwestern Illinois College – <http://www.swic.edu/>

Lewis and Clark Community College – <http://www.lc.edu/>

St. Charles Community College – <http://www.stchas.edu/>

Jefferson College – <http://www.jeffco.edu/jeffco/>

This list is by no means exhaustive. Becoming a more successful writer is a life's work, but how grand that work can be!

Every Writer Needs an Editor/Proofreader!
Mary Menke

What's the difference between a proofreader and an editor?

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12. At the end of the manuscript, wait a day or longer before you proofread
13. Always run Spell Check, but don't rely on it! (See attached "Ode to Spell Check")
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14. Print your manuscript; don't try to proofread on-screen
15. Go somewhere else to proofread
16. If time permits, read through entire manuscript without looking for errors
17. Read through again, marking mistakes (grammar, punctuation, spelling)
 - a. Also look for continuity errors, timeline errors, etc.
18. Read aloud
19. Read backwards (line by line)
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