

The Secrets of What Editors Want

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THE PITCH

Follow submission guidelines. If there has been a change at a publication, published guidelines might not be current, so network to learn more.

Do your research. Demonstrate you understand the publication's readership and voice.

Target your pitch/query. The quality of your work alone doesn't carry as much weight as quality work targeted to an audience.

Exhibit adaptability across platforms. It's good to hear about what you think is a great story. It's awesome to hear how you can deliver it to fit into a publication's format and audience.

Respect the editor's time. Format your query for easy reading.

Have an image plan. Share your thoughts on images and illustrations and where they might be obtained.

Think about offering your services, not just one story.

Find ways to collaborate. Combining what you can offer with what another freelance writer and/or photographer can offer can be a win-win for everyone.

THE CONTACT

Think about the Three P's of Publishing: Patience and Persistence without Pestering.

Do follow up but don't be overly aggressive or demanding.

Get to the point. Before you talk, have a list ready. Write succinct emails. A phone call might be more productive if there's a lot to chat about.

Don't ghost. Let editors know sooner than later if a deadline is going to be missed or an assignment is running into trouble.

Do ask relevant questions, such as:

Approving expert sources if those weren't part of the pitch or assignment

Confirming the specific angle of a story

A heads-up on anything controversial or unexpected

Avoiding rewrites.

Don't make editors do the heavy lifting. Editors don't have time to outline your entire story for you.

Do turn in your paperwork so editors can pay you.

THE DELIVERY

Deadlines. Meet them.

Avoid the Horror of the Headless Horse. Include a head, deck and subheads. Sidebars and callouts are also appreciated. Put some effort into your headline or offer a few suggestions.

Avoid lost copy. Make sure your manuscript is formatted with your contact info in case the attachment is separated from your email. Detailed slugs and bylines are also nice.

Hit your assigned word count. Writing too long or too short indicates lack of control or confidence or loss of direction.

Don't phone in the lead. It's the single most important paragraph. Give it some thought.

Spellcheck and proofread. Run your story past the sources to make sure odd words are spelled correctly or that you've fully understood what the source was saying.

Misspelled names are too horrible to contemplate.

Remember you're representing the magazine. Be kind to the sources on the other end of the telephone.

In conclusion. Make the end as strong as the beginning.