

# Publishing Your Poetry

A Poet's Guide To Submitting Poems For  
Publication

Local Gems Press

Publishing Your Poetry

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## So You Have Poetry To Publish?

So you have some poetry you want to publish? Congrats! Having poems that you have crafted and worked on is a big accomplishment even if the world at large hasn't seen them yet. Maybe you've read some of these poems at a poetry reading and gotten a good response, maybe you've had them looked over by your fellow poets at your local poetry workshop or college class, or maybe you have just been working on poems in a small notebook for yourself for a very long time but think it's time the world, or at least some readers got to see them.

You also deserve some praise for taking the step to do some research on this topic, many authors, writers, poets never get to the level where actually submitting their work for publication is a serious thought on their mind. You are also in luck, getting advice from the horse's mouth so to speak--a publisher of poetry, is a great way to prepare yourself for the process. This short book you are holding is something that we wish we had when we were starting out with our own poetry many years ago. Not only because there is so much that is easy to overlook in the beginning, but also because we were growing up during the shift of analog

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to digital, when the rules of publishing and even the rules of how we read were changing before our eyes. Things have, for the most part settled to where they are going to be for a long while. The good news? Poetry is one field that still very much out-performs in print than it does in the digital marketplace, so you will be seeing your print anthologies and magazines for poetry for quite a long time. The other good news? The online world has created more opportunities to share your work to audiences poets wouldn't have been able to reach beforehand. It really is possible to get the best of both worlds. On top of that, poetry is definitely on an upswing in popularity--you are seeing it everywhere now, from college courses to cookbooks!

Keeping all this in mind, finding a home for your poems can be on the one hand harder, but on the other hand way easier than you think. It all depends on how one goes about it. So, congrats again on your intent, and going ahead and getting this book to help you research. Let's get to it!

## A Few Thoughts Before Submitting

Some people will say that it is never too early to submit your poetry to markets---others will say that because your reputation might depend on it, you need to wait years and years and refine and re-tool your poems before you would even consider sending them out publicly.

The staff at Local Gems feel there is wisdom in both these statements but that neither one entirely works. If one waits too long to send their things in, they will keep putting it off, and putting it off, and an ounce of action is worth a gallon of theory after all. However, we have also experienced the unrelenting hope and enthusiasm of young novices who were not quite realistic about where their poetry stood in terms of quality. The good news is there are plenty of ways to get some feedback on your work if you so desire before sending it out to the eyes of possible publishers.

## **Workshops and Classes**

We know that there is a somewhat academic mindset about poetry and the need for constant revision in workshops and more specifically college or MFA level classes before they are considered worthy to put out in the world. We don't fully subscribe to this theory, as a big part of our mission is that poetry is a tool and art for everyone, not just the academic elite. However, that is not to say that learning about the forms, and learning about poetry, as well as having a chance for other people to look at and even help you a bit with your poems, is a bad thing. Workshops can be absolutely invaluable in terms of a poet's personal development in the art form.

Odds are, pretty much wherever you are, there is probably a writing group, a poetry class, or a workshop not far from where you are. Almost every college offers classes in writing, but if college is too expensive for you, they are also a popular topic for adult education or continuing education classes at nights in your school district. Poetry and writing groups are all over the place, and many of them offer workshops where poets can critique each other's work. Sometimes there are even such events at your local library.



## **Readings and Open Mics**

Another great way to get some responses to your work is to read them at your local poetry readings. Most of them have an open-mic portion of the evening. Not only are these events great for networking, they are also a lot of fun. Perhaps you already attend several, and you have a few poems that you read that always get a good amount of applause, maybe some people have come up to you after a reading to tell you how much they liked a certain poem? That might be a poem to consider submitting for publication.

## Poetry Matchmaking: Researching The Markets

*Matchmaker, matchmaker, make me a match...find me a find...catch me a catch...*

At a panel I was giving once on publishing your poetry, one of the audience members asked me during the Q and A if I had to describe what publishing poetry (or really publishing anything) was, in only one word what would that would be.

Without even thinking about it the first word that came out of my mouth was "match-making." The funny thing is up until that panel I hadn't ever put it in those words before, but afterwards I realized it is really the best way to describe it.

In the last 10 years or so specifically, especially with the ease of the internet and email programs and things of that nature, automatic clicks, and auto-timers for posting or sending...a philosophy has formed in quite a few areas that the best way to get results is to send out queries or emails or resume or job applications to hundreds or even thousands of places at once,

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and then by the law of averages, some of them will come back a success.

Speaking as a business owner as well as a poet and publisher of poetry, I can say that there are certain areas in which this type of making the "odds be ever in your favor" works very well. Poetry, in most cases is not one of these areas.

If your goal is simply to publish a few poems in any market at all just for the novelty of having been a "published poet" then this philosophy might work for you. But if you are planning to publish your poetry with any kind of consistency, or develop any kind of partnership or loyalty with any markets who will in turn be loyal and accommodating to you, perhaps even with the goal of eventually releasing a book, then this type of one size fits all thinking will not work when it comes to poetry.

Cultivating relationships, or in the business world, networking is by far the best way to keep getting results whether it be poetry, or anything else. In the beginning, the results will of course be fewer and farther between as you are just wetting your beak and testing the waters. However, the more you network, and the more relationships you form with magazines, publishers, poetry organizers, editors, etc, you will see more opportunities come up and more chances to see

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your work both in well-read online publications as well as in-print.

But more than that, definition is everything in the world of making a match. If you don't know what it is you have to offer, how can you properly offer it? What style of poetry is your poem? What is the subject-matter? Is it literary or mainstream, spoken word, beat, or a combination? Does it deal with something in particular that might have a large readership? These are all questions that it helps to ask before submitting.

Publications often have a theme, style, or general sense of things they publish. It helps to know what that is. Sometimes it's very easy--with anthologies, the theme is normally advertised up front. Other times, it might be a little harder to figure out, however, sample copies of ongoing publications are easy to get your hands on. And if it's an online publication it's very easy to look at past issues.

If a publication is regional, then it means that the only thing the poems might have in common are the geography of the poets. That's fine too, makes it a big easier, then quality rather than subject is the only major thing to consider. (Although things like g rating or poems without curse words if they have a certain readership are all points to consider.)

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We can say as publishers in no uncertain terms, that we definitely prefer the poets who have done their research about our press, our projects and our markets, than the ones who just blindly submit to us without doing such research. It can be a waste of our time as well as theirs. Early on in our publishing venture we were putting together an anthology of fantasy poetry. One poet sent us several religious poems with Jesus being the subject. We could never figure out if this was some type of commentary, or the person had simply not followed directions. In either case, this was not a match.

Don't send erotic poetry to a kids magazine, don't send Jesus poems to a fantasy anthology, and don't send depressing poetry to publication with a comedic fan base. Send your erotic poetry to an erotic publication, send the Jesus poems to a religious one, and find something funny to write about for the comedic poetry collections.

If this seems like pure common-sense to you, then we salute you, you would not believe how far ahead of the curve you already are. The tens of thousands of submissions we've gotten over the years that had nothing to do with a particular call for submissions are proof of that.

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*Match your poem to its market, and your chances of acceptance increase several fold instantly.*

## Understanding Different Markets

There are so many different markets available for publishing writing these days. However, they are obviously all very different. With the addition of the internet as well as the somewhat low barrier of entry for new magazines and publications to pop up in so many places, not all poets fully understand their various options, the pros and cons, or even the subtle differences between them.

### **School Art and Lit Mags**

For many writers, this is usually a first step. Quite a few high schools and especially colleges offer some type of art and lit, or even just a literature magazine aimed at publishing, at least on the small scale, their student's work. It makes sense, considering after all those writing classes, the authors should see the results of their work manifest in print form.

As a side note, many lit mags are also student run and edited and can be a good first step to learning about the publishing process. If you are a student,

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working on a lit mag can give you some useful insight into the selection process and the mindset of an editor. It can make submitting elsewhere a little easier, and can sometimes help make rejection easier to process.

### **Local and Regional Publications**

These are probably the most varied types of publications. They're also an excellent place to start, especially if you're looking for an introduction to a local poetry community. Local publications can range in size and scope from small anthologies put out by workshop groups to massive multi-state projects. We as a publishing firm, work with local groups to publish books all the time, and these have been as small as 6 members of a writing group to 300 members of a geographical region like New England.

Local publications are great because not only do you have a leg up when it comes to submitting by the fact you qualify through region (assuming you submit to the right publication) but there are normally book launch events not too far away where you can get the book, meet other poets from your own area and network.



## **Themed Anthologies**

Themed anthologies, as the title suggest, usually are taking poetry about something specific. It can be religion, breast cancer, autism, the environment, pretty much anything you can think of. Regular calls for submissions go out in *Poets & Writers*, on Duotrope.com, and in the *Poet's Market*. Sometimes the easiest way to find a home for a poem is to find a market looking specifically for the subject-matter that your poem happens to be about.

## **Serial Magazines**

Poetry magazines, or serial publications are quite simply a publication that happens more than once. It can be quarterly, monthly, weekly or even daily. Usually there is a subscription available for these. The well-known publication simply titled *Poetry* is a prime example. *Rattle* would be another. Some serial publications you could submit to might not even specialize in poetry, but publish poetry as well. *The New Yorker* for example.

### **Online Publications**

The internet created many new opportunities for writers, including poets. Online publications come in many shapes, sizes and forms. Some of them as simple as a blog that features poetry, others come in the form of subscription based ebook services emailed to your inbox. The methods vary, so do the sizes of the readership. Nothing feels as good as holding a print book in your hand with your own poem in it, but online publications can still be a great way to get readers for your work. Some online publication also are hybrids that produce online work as well as print publications. These can be interesting as well.

### **Contests**

Poetry contests are very popular. Many contests result in eventual publication for the winners and honorable mentions. Sometimes, a good number of poets who submit are offered publication in a resulting anthology or chapbook. Not all contests are created equal, but many of them are definitely worth looking into. *Poets & Writers*, and the *Poet's Market* list plenty of them.

## **Academic Journals**

These are the publications that many consider to be the peak of poetry publishing--the big-name academic journals with the built-in distribution that academic and famous poets publish their work in. Many of them are published by university presses, though not all of them. Literary and academic poets might find these markets interesting to attempt to publishing in, however it helps to be aware of the submission process. Some of them take submissions from outside sources, some of them only publish from within--IE professors and students at their own schools, or professors from other schools, etc. We're not saying you can't get into these publications, some people do. But it would be better to attempt these once you've gotten some publication credits under your belt first from other sources. Even then, be aware that the odds are not outstanding.

## Rules, Guidelines and Tips

You will find, during your journey of submitting your poetry, that there are no real hard and fast rules that are universal across the board--every market will have a different set of rules. However, there are some guidelines that are pretty helpful and general rules of thumb that will up your chances.

### 1: Become Familiar with the Publication

This is the most important piece of advice we can give you! A big part of getting your poetry published is finding the right publication for you and for your specific poem. Take some time to research the publication you are submitting to. If it's a magazine or journal, or other serial publication, pick up a past edition or two to get a sense of what they're looking for.

*It's important to note here that we're not suggesting you should write to please specific editors, or seem like you are sucking up either, but the selection process is subjective and sending in the sort*

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*of poems you think they are looking for will drastically increase your chances of getting published.*

You'll also want to make sure you do your homework when it comes to submission guidelines.

### 2: Previous publications, Yay or Nay?

Some publications do not accept works that have been previously published elsewhere. Some are stricter than others when it comes to what defines being published. Some even go as far to consider anything that has been posted on your blog or social media to have been previously published. Others are fine with you submitting previously published material as long as you give credit to the place that published it first. If you do submit a previously published poem, make sure you still have the rights to it. (Most publications should not take the rights to your poems. If they are asking for the rights, be weary. Your work should revert back to you after publication.)

Also be aware that some publications do not accept simultaneous submissions, that is, poems you are sending to multiple places for possible publication at once. If you have a poem you'd like to submit to

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multiple markets, make sure that the publications you are sending to are ok with that.

### 3: Give them the poem the way they want it

Some publications use a third-party service like Submittable. Some take submissions by e-mail or contact forms. Others, though they are rare as of the time of this writing, take hard copy submissions sent via snail mail. Occasionally, publications will take a combination of each. Make sure you read the guidelines thoroughly and follow directions: How do they want the submissions sent to them? If e-mail, do they want it as a single attachment? Multiple attachments? With or without your name/contact information?

Not doing so is a good way to get your poems automatically disqualified, especially from publications that get a high volume of submissions. They want it the way they want it for a reason.

## Other Considerations

*Fail faster. Succeed sooner.*

-David Kelley, entrepreneur, author

So many authors we've spoken with hesitate to submit their work because they're afraid of rejection. Rejection can be unpleasant and scary, but it's also a useful tool for refining your approach, and it's also completely natural, particularly when dealing with a large publication that can potentially get thousands of submissions.

### **Dealing with Rejection**

If the fear of the sting of rejection is holding you back, one way we suggest dealing with it is by treating submitting like pulling of a band-aid or jumping into a cold pool. The best way to handle rejection is to put yourself out there. The great poets we read in school all had to deal with rejection, many, many times. A couple of famous poets claim to have at one point wall-papered their bedrooms with rejection letters. In the age of email submissions, this might be a bit

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harder. But in publishing, like in anything, when you see a success story, you are in reality, seeing someone who ran out of ways to fail. Like Ray Croc advised; persistence.

### **Submission/Reading Fees**

It's important to keep in mind that some publications require you to submit a fee with your submission. This is more common with contests that offer prizes and most publications that charge some kind of fee also offer some sort of compensation for getting published. Reading fees should be small. If a publication is charging a fee and offering no prize and no compensation for publication, our advice would be to avoid that publication.

### **Compensation**

Compensation varies widely between publications. Some offer a small to moderate amount of money. Some offer contributor's copies or a discount on book orders. Contributor's copies are the most common form of compensation. Many other publications, especially smaller ones, offer no form of compensation. It is not uncommon for anthologies, for



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example, which contain a large number of poets, to offer no compensation or free copies. Be sure to check the submission guidelines for information on it. If you can't find any information on compensation, it's usually safe to assume that particular publication doesn't offer any.

*Important Note: Publications that do not pay are not vanity presses. There has been confusion with this in recent years. A vanity press is a press that will publish anything you send them if you pay them a certain amount of money.*

### **Rights:**

One of the most common questions we get at our press is if the poets retain the rights to their poems. (Yes, by the way.) Different publications handle rights differently. Many ultimately allow the author to retain the rights to their poems after publication. Sometimes they might want exclusive rights to a poem for a specific period of time, like 3 or 6 months. Beyond that, it becomes tricky. We recommend not publishing anywhere that will not allow you to retain the rights to your poems.



## Workbook

One thing many poets at our workshops report is trouble keeping track of the submissions they have sent. So for the final pages of this book we wanted to include a little workbook to help poets keep track of their poem submissions. It's a relatively simple set up, with dates sent, dates replies received and a space to keep track of any personal notes or anything the publications might say. Feel free to use these pages in your journey to publication.

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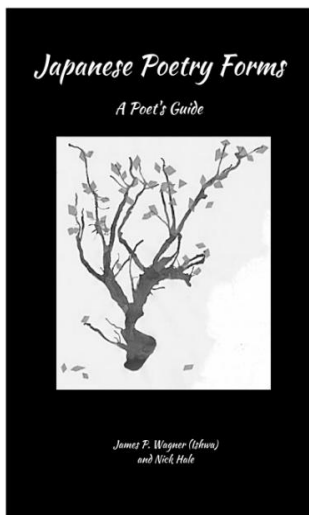
## About the Authors

James P. Wagner (Ishwa) is an editor, publisher, award-winning fiction writer, essayist, performance poet, and alum twice over (BA & MALS) of Dowling College. He is the publisher for Local Gems Poetry Press and the Senior Founder and President of the Bards Initiative, a Long Island based non-profit dedicated to using poetry for social improvement. He was named National Beat Poet Laureate of Long Island, NY for 2017-2019. He has been on the advisory boards for the Nassau County Poet Laureate Society and the Walt Whitman Birthplace Association. James also helped with the Dowling College Writing Conference. His poetry is also used to autism advocacy, having appeared at the Naturally Autistic Conference in Vancouver and in Naturally Autistic Magazine, as well as his essays. James believes poetry is alive and well and thoroughly enjoys being a part of poetic culture. His most recent collection of poetry is Ten Year Reunion.

Nick Hale is a literal and metaphorical hat collector. He is the vice president and a co-founder of The Bards Initiative. Originally a native of Huntington, Nick currently lives in Northern Virginia where he leads workshops and hosts readings and seminars through his group NoVA Bards. Nick is a publisher and editor with Local Gems Press. He has worked on many anthologies including the best-selling *Sound of Solace*. In addition to writing, teaching, organizing performing, and editing poetry, Nick enjoys reminding people that there are no bad jokes, only bad audiences.

# *Japanese Poetry Forms*

*A Poet's Guide*



When people think of Japanese poetry, the Haiku is the first thing that comes to mind. But the Haiku did not become the Haiku we know until a thousand years after the first manuscripts of classical Japanese poetry were written.

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