

# How to Submit Poems for Publication

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## I. PUBLISHING INDIVIDUAL POEMS

**a. Think this through.** What are your goals? Anybody can get published. To publish just means to make public. You can show a poem to friends, you can make a little booklet of poems and give it to your friends or get the local bookstore to keep a few copies for you. You can read a poem aloud at an open mike night. Or if you write religious verse, you can get your church newsletter to print it, or you can send it to a magazine that prints verse just like yours. There's even a national organization of "Cowboy Poets"! You can pay a company to make copies of a book for you. All of these are ways of making your work available to a particular audience.

**b. Read the magazines and journals.** If your goal is to enter the larger conversation of poets, to have your work read and evaluated by a national audience, then you will need to be very familiar with what's out there. Read several of the best poetry journals (ones with national circulation), to see how your poems seem, in comparison with these. You won't like everything you read, but try to get a feel for what's being published. You should subscribe to at least a couple of poetry journals a year, then rotate to others, to continue to broaden your base of possibilities.

A small sample of well-known poetry journals:

*Poetry*  
*The American Poetry Review* (a tabloid-style publication)  
*The Kenyon Review*  
*The Georgia Review*  
*The Southern Review*  
*Shenandoah*  
*Arts and Letters*  
*Midwest Quarterly*  
*Poetry Northwest*  
*Indiana Review*  
*Iowa Review*  
*Crab Orchard Review*

*Michigan Quarterly Review*  
*Chelsea*  
*Gettysburg Review*

Where to go to find the names of magazines and journals that publish a lot of poetry:

**The Directory of Poetry Publishers**

Dustbooks, P.O. Box 100, Paradise, CA 95967

[www.dustbooks.com](http://www.dustbooks.com)

**Poet's Market**

Writer's Digest Books

F&W Publications

1507 Dana Ave.

Cincinnati, Ohio 45207

You will want to STUDY these books. They list names and addresses, requirements for sending poems—how many to send, how they should be sent, what times of year they read poems, if it's okay to submit simultaneously to them and to other journals, etc., how many poems they print each year, what percentage of poems received that they actually publish.

Look for the small journals to start with. Look for ones, maybe, that are looking for poems on subjects that you often write about. Look for ones that seem new, or particularly open to beginners. If you read carefully, you can tell.

**c. Subscribe.** Anyone who wants to publish poetry should subscribe to

**Poets & Writers Magazine**

P.O. Box 543

Mt. Morris, IL 61054 ([www.pw.org](http://www.pw.org))

and possibly to

**The Writer's Chronicle**

Associated Writing Programs

Mail Stop IE3

George Mason University

Fairfax, VA 22030

[awpchron@mason.gmu.edu](mailto:awpchron@mason.gmu.edu)

The above publications have sections in the back that list magazines looking for poems on particular subjects, contests (individual poem contests as well as book contests). Some of these contests cost money. They are legitimate. The fees help pay for the contest prize, or they pay for hiring some big-name poet to do the judging.

#### **d. SUBMIT.**

- a. Follow the guidelines each journal has for submission.
- b. Send a clean (new) copy each time. Don't re-send rejected poems if they look dog-eared. Put your name and address in the upper right corner. Put only one poem per page, white paper, plain Roman typeface. Don't do anything fancy. Fold and put in white envelope with a stamped, self-addressed return envelope—absolutely crucial.
- c. Send a very brief cover letter. “Dear .....(know the editor's name), I enclose four poems for you to consider for publication in *Poetry* magazine. I have published poems previously in ..... (or, I have not published poems before. This is my first submission.). I am a machinist at Mopar auto parts company. Thank you for looking at these poems. Sincerely, .....

NOTE: No one knows who you are, what your training is, how old you are, or anything else about you when you submit poems. Say as little or as much as you like. You have the same chance as everyone else. Journal editors are always looking for new “discoveries.” But of course, your work has to interest and excite an editor. It has to stand above many other submissions. So you must read many poems and study the craft, to be ready for national publication.

## **II. PUBLISHING A BOOK**

### **Self-publishing**

Again, consider what your goals are as a writer. If you primarily want to be able to share your poems with your family and friends, you may want to pay to have your book published, or you may want to design it yourself and take it to a local copy center to have them make copies for you. Sometimes local bookstores are willing to put your book on a shelf of “local writers.”

## **Publishing by national presses**

**1. What you need to do first.** You must publish some poems—a fair number of them—in magazines with national circulation. This validates you to an editor, but more importantly, if national magazines are beginning to accept your poems, it means that your work has begun to show signs of being competitive in the book publication market.

**2. Buy and study single collections (books) of poems.** Buy and read a lot of books by poets you admire. Notice how the collections are put together, how the poems speak to each other. Notice how many poems make up a collection. Get your book manuscript in perfect order, with a table of contents page, acknowledgements page, and so on.

**3. Book Contests.** In *Poets & Writers*, *The Writer's Chronicle*, and in the two directories listed above, there are lists of national contests for book (and chapbook) publication. These usually charge a reading fee. This is to help pay for publication costs and to pay a poet to read the finalists. This can get expensive, so choose carefully which presses you want to send your manuscript to. **YOU MAY SIMULTANEOUSLY SUBMIT BOOK MANUSCRIPTS TO PRESSES.** They will simply want to know as soon as it's accepted elsewhere.

**4. Chapbook Contests.** Chapbooks are shorter collections (around 30 pages) of poems. As a beginner, your chances here are probably greater. Poems published in a chapbook may later be added to a book manuscript, since chapbook publication is not considered a “book” publication.

**5. University Presses.** University Presses don't care who you are. You don't have to have any university affiliation to publish with them. They're looking for good work that may not be published by a trade press (Norton, Viking, etc.) because it may not have a large enough market. Many university presses run contests. A few don't, but accept submissions at certain times of the year. Look them up in one of the Directories, check their websites, or write them a letter (include a SASE), to find out if and when they accept manuscripts.

**6. Trade Presses.** Pretty much forget it. Harcourt Brace, Knopf, Norton, Harper-Collins, and so on, are looking for very well-established writers whose work they can be assured of selling.

### **When to begin sending work out:**

Some people will say not to send out poems until you've gotten very good. I think just the act of sending them out may help you to be aware of audience in a way that nothing else will. Go ahead, but always have a fresh envelope ready to send them out again as soon as they come back rejected. It will keep you from feeling depressed. And if they're rejected over and over and over, better look at them again.

Revise and revise, both before you send poems out for the first time and after they've had a number of rejections. Keep reading good poems. Join a workshop, preferably one that's led by a publishing poet.

Keep reading good books about writing poems. Some suggestions:

- a. Kennedy and Gioia, *An Introduction to Poetry***
- b. Strand and Boland, *The Making of a Poem***
- c. Behn and Twitchell, *The Practice of Poetry***
- d. Voigt, *The Flexible Lyric***
- e. Bishop, *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Poem***
- f. Wallace and Boisseau, *Writing Poems***