Getting Your Article into Print
A Writer's and an Editor's Perspective

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> *Getting an article accepted is a dialogue between the writer and editor. The more the writer understands and responds to the editor's needs—the more quickly the article will appear in print.*

Writer: *Why write?*
Editor: *What are an editor's responsibilities?*
Writer: *What do I write about?*
Editor: *What do editors want? What do editors get?*
Writer: *How do I write an article? Where do I sent it?*
Editor: *How will editors edit*?
Writer: *How do I deal with feedback*?

Writer: Why Write?

- Not for the money. Typical reimbursement is two copies of the periodical.

- Get the word out. Rest assured, your heirs won't publish it after you're gone.

- Get the word back. Hear from others working on the same family or from "cousins" who may own a wealth of family records otherwise inaccessible.

- Receive free professional consultation from editors and evaluators. Do your arguments hold up under expert scrutiny? Have you done enough research? Did you miss a source?

- Writing is an organization tool. Problems are quickly seen when your case is put to paper.

- Your family might be impressed.

- You might be impressed!

Editor: What Are the Editor's Responsibilities?

An editor's job security is dependent upon keeping a happy (and yearly renewing) readership. To do so, the editor must produce issues on time that meet the readers' expectations of content and quality. *The reader is the editor's customer, the writer is one of many suppliers*. The writer and editor, however, work towards the same goal—to produce the best article possible.

- An editor is not a typist.

- Editors campaign to obtain manuscripts from many writers. Based on variety, article readiness, and the theme of a particular issue, they decide the "line-up" of articles to be used.

- Editors verify facts and citations and look for errors—both grammatical and typographical.

- Editors *have both a right and an obligation* to make changes and additions as well as rewrite where they deem necessary.

Writers not willing to be flexible will be avoided by the best editors. The *more your work conforms* to the style and requirements of the periodical, the *sooner the article will get into print*.

Writer: What Should I Write About?

- Whatever the editor wants/needs/asks for (and doesn't get enough of).
- Something short.
- Compiled genealogy (the further back the ancestry, the more reader interest there will be).
- Single-individual narrative (biography or family history, it should be well-documented).
- Correction of something already in print (one paragraph to many pages).
- Solution to a difficult problem (that's how we learn).
- About a resource: archive, record group, type of record (share your experience).
- Straight methodology or methodology with example (two-fer, use your own family).
- "Filler" article, often a short (half page or less), humorous item of interest.
- Anything that you find yourself discussing with other genealogists three times in three weeks (exclude gossip about other genealogists!).

Editor: What Do Editors Want?

Editors want their readers to find articles of interest in every issue. To do so, they need to offer a variety of articles that capture and maintain the readers' interest. Some tips on what we look for:

- Articles should be written as succinctly as possible. Most readers will not suffer through *a long and involved* article about *someone else's* family.
- A strong opening paragraph captures interest. If the reader is not "hooked" within 15 seconds, he will dismiss the article. Give the reader a personal interest in what's to follow and add some suspense if possible. Are we going to solve a long-standing mystery? Are we going to debunk a sacred cow? Are we going to show how an ignored record group can help us find answers to our problems? Tell us up front.
- Make your article relevant to *all* readers. *The way you solve a problem is more important than the problem itself and the family under study*. Most readers won't care about learning all there is to know about your Aunt Thelma's ancestors. But they will be interested in the methodology and records you used to find them.

Editor: What Do Editors Get?

Few manuscripts are received without problems. Those that occur most often include:

- Lack of focus and organization. To avoid this, create an outline that first states the problem and then proceeds step-by-step in a logical thought progression to its solution.
- Too long or serialized. Excess words muddle the mind and consume expensive printing dollars.
- Incomplete or erroneous citations, or citations not keyed to each fact.
- Erroneous conclusions. This is usually a result of incomplete research.
- Everything but the kitchen sink thrown in. Stay on topic! If you truly need to go off on a tangent, do it in a footnote, not in the body of the text.
- Bad grammar, poor spelling, trite expressions, weak verbs, overuse of the passive voice, excess verbiage.
- Lazy research. Too much reliance on secondary sources, or insufficient research. Don't turn in a compiled genealogy if you haven't thoroughly studied the deeds, probates, and court records.

- Wrong locality. Don't send your study of southern migration patterns to *The Maine Genealogist*.
- Omniscient and arrogant authors. If you are defensive about having an editor check your work or rewrite your paragraph, start your own periodical.

Writer: How Do I Write an Article?

- Good writers aren't born, they are made—through lots and lots of practice. Acquire experience by submitting short articles to a local newsletter. They need someone to report on everything from the vendors at the upcoming workshop to new rules for getting vital records from the state.
- Study in detail the style and content of articles published previously in your target journal.
- If you are working on something that looks like it might make an interesting article, write the research as an article as you go along.
- Do a literature search (PERSI and FHLC at the minimum). It's good research practice and good editors won't accept articles on material that's already in print, no matter how much better your presentation is.
- Write a statement of theme at the top to keep you focused. If you have a problem staying on task and finishing the article, use one of the many genealogical writing contests as a goal.
- Strive to be *clear*, *correct*, *concise*, and *understandable*.
- Cut the excess verbiage. Follow Mark Twain's advice: "Writing is easy, all you have to do is cross out the wrong words." Try looking away and saying your ideas aloud. Often the spoken word is more efficient.
- Don't describe the research *process* (except in methodology articles), just the *results*.

  Not: *I have corresponded with many other researchers of this family, most of whom have stated that Sarah was the daughter of John, except for the ones who didn't know who she was the daughter of. Over the years I have found some things, especially this one deed, that made me doubt that, but I never found any proof. But last year when my husband and I went to visit his sister, I persuaded him to stop at the county courthouse and there I looked at the probate indexes for the Allen family and found a lot of entries, so then I looked at each of the entries. There was one for Joseph and I looked at it. It was a little faded, but not too hard to read and it said that Sarah was the daughter of Joseph, not John like all the other people thought.*

  Instead: *The deed shows that Sarah was the daughter of Joseph, not John as stated by earlier researchers. This was further proved by a receipt in Joseph's probate, in which Sarah acknowledged receiving her portion of Joseph's estate.*

- Count your words (the shorter the article, the more quickly it will be accepted and used). A good rule of thumb: Short=700–800 words (newsletter minor topic). Medium=1500 words (journal minor topic). Long=3000 words (journal major topic). Very long=3000+ words (must be *really* important).
- Conform to the periodical's style. Readers expect the organization, tone, numbering, and documentation to be consistent throughout a periodical. Style is not arbitrary nor meaningless. Nathaniel Hawthorne said, "The greatest possible merit of style is to make the words absolutely disappear into the thought."
- Always have *at least* one friend who isn't afraid to be critical look it over. *Accept their criticisms* and *suggestions for improvement*. If they are confused by something, others will be as well.
- Provide proper *and full* citations for absolutely everything and send copies of all documents that are crucial to your argument. All good editors will go back and check your sources; sending copies with the submission avoids a time-consuming step.

- If you quote something, quote it exactly as it is in the original. That includes punctuation, spelling, use of superscripts or subscripts. If you omit a part of the quotation, use ellipses properly. If you add editorial comments, use square brackets.

- If you want to use long quotations or illustrations from sources under copyright protection, obtain written permission to use them prior to submitting your article. An editor will not have the time to do that for you.

Writer: Where do I send it?

Before submitting to a specific journal, *read* at least two years of recent issues to get the feel of its articles. Often the periodical itself will include a section explaining its philosophy and how to submit. Some journals have a separate piece detailing submission guidelines.

The periodicals listed below have editors with strong editorial policies. More information about them may be found on their or their society websites:

The American Genealogist (privately published, "TAG")
The Essex Genealogist (Essex [Co., Mass.] Society of Genealogists, "TEG")
The Genealogist (American Society of Genealogists)
The Maine Genealogist (Maine Genealogical Society)
National Genealogical Society Quarterly ("NGSQ")
The New England Historical and Genealogical Register ("The Register")
New York Genealogical and Biographical Records ("The Record")
Rhode Island Roots (Rhode Island Genealogical Society)
Vermont Genealogist (Genealogical Society of Vermont)

- Only submit to one journal at a time. If they decline, *then* you can submit it elsewhere.

- Follow journal standard on documentation and numbering (Register or NGSQ). If the journal uses footnote citations, don't send your article with endnotes.

- Do not put your name on any pages of the article. (Some journals use readers to evaluate articles and prefer the readers to be unbiased.)

- Put title and page number in a running header or footer.

- These days, nearly all journals prefer email submissions. Send the article both as an MS Word file and as a separate pdf file. (If you don't use Word, find a way to save the article as a Word file). If your article is accepted, editors will begin the editing process by "flowing" the Word file into the journal's template.

Editor: How Will Editors Edit?

The amount of copyediting needed depends on how well the first draft of the article meets the standards of the periodical. Once you have submitted, allow a reasonable amount of time for the editor to respond, which may take the form of one of the following:

- Accept the article as is, only minor changes needed.
- Good, but needs some rewriting/restructuring/reorganization.
- Possible, but needs more research.
- The Idea has potential, but it needs a new direction, more research, or development of another aspect.
- Reject. The article does not fit the needs of the journal.

In the case of the first two responses, it is likely the editor will have already made the suggested changes. Then it is merely a matter of the writer approving the changes or negotiating other alterations.

If the article is returned for more research, organization, or development of another aspect, then it is back to the drawing board for the writer and the article will need to be resubmitted at a later date.

Once your article has been accepted, expect a good editor to fact-check every aspect of your article:

- Checks for the correctness of facts.
- Checks for consistency of detail. This would cover citations, dates, and spelling of names. The editor will also look for errors in punctuation, grammar, and spelling and fix improper word usage, in general trying to make the writing more effective. This may involve some rewriting, reorganizing, and pruning.

The writer should view all of these activities as a protection—both for the author and for the editor—and should welcome them.

The editor will return to the author a first edited draft of the article for comments. The editor may include at this time a list of questions or requests for further documentation.

Do not be surprised if a major journal accepts your article and doesn't run it for several years. With fewer and fewer journals surviving the internet age, article backlogs on editors' desks have gotten larger.

Writer: How Do I Deal with Feedback?

Seeking feedback is very important. Even negative or critical feedback can be a gift. Just because it took us a long time to discover some detail, person, or story doesn't mean it belongs in the article or book.

Feedback from others can help us discover:

- What we have left out that's important
- What we've included that's really unnecessary, repetitive or distracting
- How to make our proof argument stronger or easier to follow
- How to get readers excited about our story and wanting to read the entire article or book
- What additional resources we hadn't thought to check

Nevertheless, criticism can hurt and make us feel defensive, especially when we get feedback that we didn't expect or that touches on our blind spot or sore spot or criticizes something we hold dear. We may feel overwhelmed and even go through a series of emotional reactions. The acronym SARAH can help you identify and work through your negative emotions:

- S = SHOCK—What? I wasn't expecting any criticism about that. I thought it was just fine!
- A = ANGER—Who are you to tell me that? I've been working on this for years.
- R = REJECTION—I'm not changing that. If you don't like the article the way I wrote, too bad for you. That will be too much work to make the changes you suggest.
- A = ACCEPTANCE—Oh. Maybe there is something to your suggestion. Perhaps it could be useful. Maybe it won't take as long as I thought.
- H = HOPE/HELP—OK. I think I can make those changes and I think they'll help make the article or book better.