

# How to Sell Your Article: Fast and Correctly

Selling Your Work · By Simon Townsend · 5 min read

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How to sell your article - fast and correctly

I recommend strongly against "query letters". I hate them, as do all editors. You "query" if an editor is interested in your idea. Editors aren't interested in ideas - they want finished, polished articles to consider. Anyway, 95% of an editor's mail never gets to him/her. The assistant culls all mail. Of the 5% the editor looks at he replies to one or two and tosses most in the waste-bin.

THAT is the terrible reality of life today.

Writing query letters make a student feel he/she is DOING SOMETHING, but it's just time-wasting. I encourage students (even though uninvited), to send in the article (after phoning . . . see the other side?) with a short attached covering letter like this below?. A professional editor knows from 30 seconds of skim-reading your article if he wants it. He has such little interest in your covering letter, that he wants it short like this example below?. - Simon

When writing a COVERING letter, follow PRECISELY these five rules:

1. USE ABSOLUTELY AS FEW WORDS AS POSSIBLE.
2. Let your article speak for you.
3. A super-short COVERING letter allows the editor to get on with 30 seconds of skim-reading your attached article.
4. RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO TALK ABOUT YOURSELF. No one cares.
5. If your article is accepted, NEVER then send-in changes to your article . . . you will greatly irritate your editor.

This is my short, businesslike example COVERING LETTER to which your article is attached.?

36/301 Elizabeth Street Kerry Nurk phone (08) 7533 9283

Adelaide SA 5000 FREELANCE JOURNALIST fax (08) 7417 7417

kerry.nurk@ozemail.com.au mobile 0411 751 212

7 September 2010 Always use a NAME.

ALWAYS phone publication to get updated, correct name and spelling.

Ms Mary Smith Make sure you get current title 100% correct.

Editor-in-Chief NEVER TRUST ANY LIST (even a list).

Whoopy Magazine Always use the publication's name, NOT the company's name.

231 Collins Street Re-check editor's exact address when phoning editor's office.

Melbourne Vic 3000

Get right to the point. Editors are busy!

Say exact wordcount right up front. Important to editors.

## **Dear Ms Smith:**

I am the Adelaide journalist who spoke to you about this article on the phone on Tuesday.

I offer for publication a 1,053-word article titled "The Prime Minister's favourite meals his wife cooks".

Write a descriptive title, and editor knows

Also, six 35mm colour slides of the PM eating. immediately what it's all about.

Offered at your publication's going rates.

Yours sincerely Not the right time to haggle yet!

Your signature Don't write guff about where and when to contact you and willingness to talk

about this and that. Editors aren't idiots. They know your contact details are in

your letterhead. They have the right to make changes if they buy, without asking you.

## **Enclosed:**

- Article in hardcopy Conveniently allows editor to skim-read it quickly.
- Article on disk ("Word" format) Allows editor to edit electronically, and insert in the publication.
- Six color slides, numbered, plus captions with numbers
- SSAE: stamped self-addressed envelope

How to sell your article: GET OFF THE PHONE!!

## **By SIMON TOWNSEND**

If you are foolish enough to delete or change any of these tried-and-tested instructions, you will fail. If you do each one, you have a chance of your article being seriously considered.

1. PHONE FIRST Ask for the editor or whatever other name you can find in the publication. Never trust lists. If you get through to the editor, be fast. Always pay a compliment first, like: "Your publication has done fantastic articles on XXX. My name is [so-and-so], and I've written an article you'll LOVE on [XXX]. I'm sending it now and I want to double-check your [street address or email address, whatever]." 2. ?DONE
2. In other words, don't ask meekly: "May I send you my article on [XXX]?" Firmly TELL the person this article is on its way, and you're simply after accurate names, titles, addresses and a phone number. Snail-mailing with a disk and hardcopy is best, but if emailing find out if they

prefer the article as an attachment, or inside the email itself. Most editors (like me an experienced editor) refuse to open email attachments. 3.?DONE

3. If emailing your article, make sure your name (given name first, surname second) appears as the sender and the email subject line should read: "[XXX] story you are expecting". If snail-mailing an article, be sure to send a disk also. The 14pt Times Roman hardcopy allows the editor to quickly skim-read it. If she wants to use it in her publication, the disk allows her to edit quickly and insert the story into the publication's production system. 7.?DONE
4. TWO working days later you phone your contact. Quickly, politely ask three questions only:
5. I can't stress strongly enough that you must not waste the person's time with chitchat or talking about yourself. If you're asked anything, answer quickly and professionally. No matter how friendly someone is at the other end of the phone, basically they want you OFF the phone so they can get on with their work. So as always, make the other person's life easy. Be quick! And do what they MOST want you to do: GET OFF THE PHONE!! 10.?DONE
6. You must see it from an editor's viewpoint. TIP 1: Don't bitch, whinge and complain about editors who do not respond to your letters, emails and faxes. Don't sit around thinking: "What a rude person. I go to all that trouble and he/she hasn't even got the courtesy to reply, and reply quickly." TIP 2: Think of how you treat the material that turns up in YOUR letterbox: You don't respond to every pamphlet, sales message, catalogue, circular, advertisement and all the other pieces of "junk mail". You not only don't respond, you probably don't read any of it. You not only don't respond and don't read it, you probably throw it straight in the garbage bin. You may hate all this paper guff so much, you may have a sign on your letterbox demanding

"NO JUNK MAIL". TIP 3: Your editor feels just like you. Every day he/she is inundated with "junk mail". It consists of completely unusable ideas and articles totally unsuitable for his publication, and dopey or begging letters. Your editor does not have time or patience to sort through all this junk mail so most of it goes, unread, into the bin, exactly the same way you treat your junk mail at home.

Hurtful? Sure is. We all wish other people were deeply interested in us and our dreams, and ready to help, guide and care. But what I've outlined above, is the harsh reality of the freelance life today. ?I have noted this harsh truth. END

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Reprinted from The Wonderful World of Journalism. Written in the spirit of Simon Townsend's journalism craft advice. Visit [simontownsendjournalist.com](http://simontownsendjournalist.com) for the full archive.