

Getting Published

By Gary Reynolds

Introduction

There are many writers of Science Fiction out there. Some more successful, some less so. This article is intended for authors who want to improve their work and submission processes and, therefore, increase their chances of getting it accepted for a publication such as the Concept Sci-fi E-zine. Some of the advice below will also apply to novelists, some of it will not.

Let's look briefly at the kinds of things that you, as an author, need to do.

- Polish your work
- Find a suitable market
- Read the submission guidelines
- Be honest
- Be willing to edit your work
- Handle criticism positively

Polish your work

Every week, Concept Sci-fi receives a reasonable number of E-zine submissions. Around half of these are rejected before I get to the end of the story/article. The main reason for this is that the submission feels 'unpolished'. So what do I mean by this? Here are the common faults that I find with submissions:

- Spell-checking. Practically every word processing package today includes a spell checker. Yet you'd be surprised at the number of submissions that come to me containing multiple spelling mistakes. This is an instant turn-off.
- Grammar. Please check your grammar. Reading your work out-loud can often help to identify grammatical errors and so can asking someone else to proof-read the piece before you submit.
- Plot inconsistencies. Make sure that your plot, particularly the action sequences [this is where I find most fault], are consistent. Inconsistencies will put the reader off and, therefore, deter editors from accepting your piece in the first place.

At Concept Sci-fi, any of the above in a submission will not necessarily result in a point-blank refusal to publish the piece. Quite often I will feedback to the author with editing suggestions and ask them to resubmit. But please bare in mind, not all editors are alike. Some publications will reject your piece out of hand if it contains spelling mistakes, grammatical errors or an inconsistent plot.

Do the best that you can. If you feel that your article could be improved, do it before you submit.

Find a suitable market

Once your piece is written, you need to find a suitable market for it. Let's examine the world of E-zines. Within this arena, you have a number of options:

- Professional markets
- Semi-professional markets
- 'For the love' markets

All of the above are options for authors of varying experience, but it pays to be realistic. If you are new to writing, and have written perhaps just a handful of short stories, what you should really be seeking is 'exposure', i.e. getting your writing out there into the world and in front of readers. Often 'For the love' markets are the best option in this scenario. You won't get paid in hard currency for your submission, but it will be easier to get it published.

Semi-professional markets usually pay a small amount on a per-story basis – perhaps £20-£50, and Professional markets, as you might expect, will pay more (quite often based on word count).

The key here is not to rush straight to the Professional publications. Build up your experience first. Get to know editors, publications and the submission/editing process. You will be more successful in the long run.

So how do you find a market? Well, for on-line publications there are a number of resources. Concept Sci-fi, for example, is listed at Ralan (www.ralan.com) and Duotrope (www.duotrope.com).

Once you've found some potential publications, make sure that you spend time getting to know them. I suggest the following:

- **Visit the website** – does it look professional? Does it look like it's current, i.e. updated and maintained?
- **Read back-issues of the E-zine** – if your story/article appeared in this publication, would you be happy with the result? Remember, you are giving away First Publishing Rights.
- **Does your story fit in?** Science Fiction, for example, is a broad genre. If your story is about an alien girl living in a rural cottage, would you expect it to get published in 'Cyberpunk Weekly' – probably not. A little research can go a long way here.

Read the submission guidelines

Let me be blunt. E-zines and magazines have submission guidelines for a reason. If you don't follow them, your article or story may get rejected without the editor even reading it. Read the guidelines and re-read them. If they ask that you submit your work double-spaced, then that's what you should do. There are no excuses here.

Be honest

It pays to be 100% honest with the publication editor(s). Let's take an example. Concept Sci-fi asks for First Electronic Publication Rights for all of its submissions. This means that if your work has been published elsewhere (even on your own website) then we're not interested. Be honest about this. If you try to deceive the editor and are caught out, will you be surprised if they refuse to accept any further submissions from you – ever?

Be willing to edit your work

Even professional authors are sometimes asked to edit their work for a specific publication. You should be prepared to do this too. You may think that your story is the most beautifully crafted

piece ever written – and you may be right – but what's the point in that if it's not accepted.

You can be choosy about who you submit to, and can even refuse to edit a piece and you can still get published, but a little flexibility when it comes to re-working your piece can go a long way.

Let's look at a couple of examples.

I recently received a piece that was about 6,200 words. This is well within the limits of the submission guidelines. I read the story, and liked it. But there was one section that I felt didn't add anything to the story and if I'm honest, it bored me a little. So I asked the author if they would consider revising it. I've now accepted that article.

I received another piece that contained a paragraph where it was confusing who the author was referring to. I asked them to modify it, they agreed and it will now be published in the E-zine.

Handle criticism positively

Everyone will get their work rejected at some time during their writing career. It may be that your writing is not up to standard, it may be that it's not right for the chosen publication, or it might be that the editor was having a bad day when he read your work. The important thing to take away from any rejection, is that you can learn from it.

Some editors, myself included, are more than happy to provide feedback on 'why' a piece has been rejected. Consider the feedback carefully. If you agree, then re-work your story as appropriate. Sometimes, editors will even invite you to modify and then re-submit.

If at first you don't succeed...certainly do NOT give up.

Summary

I truly hope that the above article provides useful advice to both beginning and more established authors. If you write the best that you can, polish the work and submit to the right publication(s) at the right time, you significantly increase your chances of getting published. So what are you waiting for – get going!