

***10 Tips to Winning an Editor's Heart***  
***(and Signature on a Contract)***  
Ramona Richards

Your future editor will see only your work. So don't let your work—or your behavior—make you look like an idiot. Or worse . . . unprofessional.

These ten tips come from not only my years of experience but in reading interviews with agents and editors—and asking others directly—”What are you looking for in a writer?” Some of these tips are basic (for new writers) and some are for folks who are a bit more advanced.

Either way, here's a hint: Having a great idea worth publishing is the *easy* part.

## ***EDITORS WANT WRITERS WHO . . .***

### **10. . . . UNDERSTAND WHAT EDITORS DO (and what they want)**

Not all editors are created the same. This is true at all publishers, especially magazines. While some duties seem obvious, make sure you query the person most likely to buy your work. In addition . . .

- a) Read their guidelines for submission. (You're going to see that a lot on this list....)
- b) Know his or her name—and be respectful. Address them either as Mr., Ms., Miss, or Mrs. If they get back to you and answer just using their first name, fine. Keep your contact formal until then. And NEVER submit something “To Whom It May Concern,” which gets no one's attention. PROVE to them that you know their publication interests and policies.
- c) Be flexible. If you get an interested response from an editor, whatever you do, don't go away miffed that he didn't want exactly what you offered. If he shows interest in your article or book proposal but asks you to rewrite in a particular fashion—or asks for an entirely different topic—be flexible and show him what you're made of as a writer. Too many writers give up when their work doesn't immediately get accepted for publication. Be professional and be thankful he has shown an interest in your work at all. Evaluate his thoughts and learn from them.
- d) NEVER send an editor unwanted or repeated complaint emails.

## **9. . . . ARE HIGHLY DISCIPLINED, PASSIONATE, AND PRODUCE ORIGINAL WORK—A LOT.**

This is where all those great ideas come into play. Whether you write fiction, nonfiction, or magazine articles, every editor I've talked to wants to help writers build careers. They want someone who knows their business, knows what they want, and can pitch an article or a book on the spur of a moment. Most editors are not interested in an author with no plans to write more.

## **8. . . . READ VORACIOUSLY.**

Who do you want to write for? Are you reading their books, their magazines?

If you aren't, then you're missing out on something vital—TONE. All publishers have a list of topics or genres they're acquiring. But if you aren't reading every article in SCUBA DIVING, scouring AVON's fiction, and absorbing BARBOUR's nonfiction titles, then you're going to miss the tone of their books.

This is NOT the same as VOICE—which is the way YOU tell a story. Tone can cover level of education, depth of study, etc. This also part of “knowing your market” (see number 4).

## **7. . . . ARE GROWNUP (aka No Divas Allowed)**

Lock your ego in a closet. Your editor is not your mother, best friend, pastor, or therapist. Writers who throw tantrums, pitch hissy fits, and try to tell an editor her job fall into one of two categories—NYT best-sellers or unemployed. Note what you have to do before that first one can happen. Editors love writers who are realistic about their work and the business of writing.

This does NOT mean you can't be an advocate of your own work. There's a difference in making a point and creating a scene.

## **6. . . . UNDERSTAND THE “DON'TS” of SUBMITTING (beyond the guidelines)**

**a) DON'T** try to make your **manuscript** stand out physically. In other words, don't fall in love with how pretty a word processing program can make your submission. Use a readable font. No fun typesetting. **YOUR WORDS ARE YOUR MESSAGE.** Let them stand on their own.

**b) DON'T** try to make **yourself** stand out. Don't get cute with the cover letter or email. Don't include bio information that doesn't relate to the submission, no matter how interesting. As author Holly Lisle points out her website for writers:

“Don’t include erotic photos of yourself, photos of yourself with your pet tiger, or even erotic photos of yourself with your pet tiger.” That last part is especially something Christian editors don’t want to see. And, yes, we have.

**c) DON’T** waste your—and your editor’s!—time with a sob story cover letter that describe your sacrifices to produce this work, even if your book or article is about your personal story. Editors are looking for stories that fit the market and are intriguing—and they don’t really care if you worked on it so hard you lost your house. Really.

Well...OK, we do CARE. We just can’t do anything about it. We can’t buy a bad piece of writing just because you weren’t a good steward. And we’ll resent you making us feel guilty about it.

**d) DON’T** mention money. Seriously, if you’re in this for the money, you’re in for a reality check.

## 5. . . . UNDERSTAND THE “Do’s” of SUBMITTING (including the guidelines)

**a) DO** read manuscript guidelines. Repeat this. Often. One of the biggest mistakes new writers make is not doing enough research on what an editor, agent, or publisher wants. You get so excited about finishing that manuscript, you just want it on the market NOW. Bad idea. *Do Not Make the Mistake of thinking guidelines don’t apply to you.* (If you’re writing for magazines, also check their image guidelines, if photos are needed.)

Part of most guidelines include format. Be kind to your editor and don’t make them work to read your work. And, yes, editors can and WILL reject a manuscript solely because of its format. Bad formatting is not “clever and cute” or “attention-getting.” It demonstrates sloppiness and/or a lack of professionalism (see number 2).

**b) DO** query the editor first to see if she wants to look at your book or article. Check websites; read publications.

**c) DO** check for genre interests and needs (for fiction) or a topic list (for magazines and nonfiction). You can write the greatest science fiction novel since Arthur C. Clarke, but if you send it to a romance editor, you might as well write “I AM AN IDIOT” on the envelope.

Corollary to c): Editors who get manuscripts outside their acquiring interest do **not** read them. We don’t have time to read anything we can’t or are not interested in buying. So you’ve just wasted your time—and hopes.

#### 4. . . . **KNOW THEIR MARKET AND THEIR READERS**

“Their” in this case means YOU as well as your potential editor’s. YOUR market and YOUR readers. What do you want to write? Who reads what you write?

This means a BROAD knowledge of the market. Do you write inspirational paranormals about Born-Again Vampires in Juneau? Cool. Seen any in Books-a-Million lately? No? Hm.....

Do you write inspirational category romances? Who publishes those? Who reads them? What type of formula do they follow?

Would you submit a biographical piece about Don Miller or Brian McLaren to *Charisma*? Or...even better...how COULD you position an article about Don or Brian that *Charisma* would be interested?

In other words, know your target audience as intimately as you know your potential publisher. Why?

BECAUSE THEIR READERS are why the guidelines exist! Editors buy for the best books (or articles) for the market.

Never forget that writing is an art; publishing is a business.

#### 3. . . . **KNOW THEIR CRAFT**

Writing IS an art—but it’s also technique and craft. The best writers have learned this, and it’s part of developing your own writing voice. For instance . . .

**a)** Vary your sentence structure. This is not about correct grammar or never splitting an infinitive (which is allowable, by the way). It’s about working and editing and struggling to give your writing interest and variety. This applies to fiction as well as non-fiction. It’s about keeping your verbs active and your conjunctions to a minimum. It’s about having a wide and appropriate vocabulary. It’s about having a voice that keeps readers reading.

Now a couple of suggestions for fiction . . .

**b)** Watch your POV shifts. While it’s fine to shift POVs, do it properly, with corresponding scene or chapter shifts—NOT within the scene or paragraph.

Some new writers think that kind of “head hopping” is a type of “omniscient POV.” It’s not. I can count on one hand the number of published authors who can handle an omniscient POV, which is vastly different from what most writers think

it is. (Hint: an omniscient narrator doesn't get in anyone's head.) If you're just starting out, don't. It's one of the world's fastest ways to annoy an editor who's looking for characters with a deep/limited third-person POV.

c) Create natural sounding speech. This is a fine, artistic line . . . your dialog has to “read” natural without being natural. After all, truly natural speech would be full of repetitions, ums, ahs, useless words, and annoying misuses.

Speech in fiction is a compromise between the formal and “natural.” Use contractions, short cuts, etc.

Craft shows with every word. You don't have to tell an editor anything about what you've learned. They'll see it in your work.

## **2. . . . ARE PROFESSIONAL**

This is so vital I can't emphasize this enough.

### **Editors love writers who are PROFESSIONAL.**

They treat what they do as a career—it's their JOB. They behave as they would in any “normal” job. They treat themselves, their colleagues, their editors, and their WORK with respect. They learn. They set goals. They strive to be the best they can be.

They respect their work and are proud of it, but not so in love with it that they can't be realistic about the chasm between idea and marketplace. They work with their editor and publisher to close that gap, whatever it takes.

They understand that writing as a profession is NOT therapy. It is not journaling. Writing is NOT simply catharsis but creation.

Most of all, they understand that publishing is a business.

- They promote online, network, and seek to work with other writers

- They have a marketing plan ready for a book upon submission

- They know how to position their work in the marketplace. They understand the competition and how their work is different.

- They are willing to see the publisher as partner not servant.

## **AND . . . FINALLY, THE NUMBER ONE QUALITY EDITORS ARE LOOKING FOR IN A WRITER IS . . .**



# SANITY

Oh, the stories I could tell. . . .

Seriously. Like the author I had to turn over to the FBI, for instance.



One of the major reasons for networking, attending conferences, joining writer's group, etc., is to get up close and personal with agents, editors, and other writers. To learn from their experiences and their advice.

There's nothing like having a one-on-one with an editor, even if he's not interested in what you write *now*, to convey that you are in this because you *have* to write and you *want* to sell, and that you will be professional and **sane** in a relationship. That you will listen to a publisher's needs.

That your talent and amazing ideas come complete with an understanding of what this business is all about.

Editors have a long memory. And they talk to each other. Often.

And we love sane writers who listen and learn—and then go write the best possible book or article they can.

May God bless you in your journey.