

Deleted or Blacklisted Writers: what publishers never want to see from writers

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This is about how not to be deleted or blacklisted as a writer. It's everything you need to know about the most common mistakes writers make when submitting their manuscripts to publishers.

The past couple of weeks, I've gotten some interesting emails about submitting manuscripts to publishers.

In particular, how to go about it but also when to know that it's really time to try submitting to a publisher – or if perhaps a manuscript needs more help.

Thanks to Tiffany Dickinson, I'll be writing a full series about this whole process, from suitable manuscript all the way to publishing deal. She asked me to do this and I think it's a really good idea. So here we go!

Are you getting ready to send your manuscript to a publisher?

This is about how to make sure you don't get deleted or blacklisted.

Artist unknown.

Writers don't always realize this, but if you mess up badly enough, you will be remembered - in the wrong way.

You might wonder, "Is my manuscript good enough?" How do you know when it's ready to submit?

This is a really big deal. If you've done your homework and [found a publisher or two](#) you'd really like to develop a long-term relationship with, submitting a sub-par manuscript could hurt your chances. *Right?*

We read everywhere that sending garbage to a publisher will damage your reputation forever. But is that really true? Well...

It is true, sure. But publishers are reasonable people (for the most part). They're human. So I want to share with you some important insights about the type of stuff that will get you either deleted or blacklisted in this business.

I'll also write about how to know when your manuscript is truly ready to submit, but I'll need to go into that in the next part of this series. It's coming.

The First Rung of Consideration

If you've ever met someone who worked as a Reader for a publishing company, then you have some incredible insight as to how embarrassingly idiotic some writers can be. Really.

You might imagine that when you address a submission to a particular person at a publishing company, that they are indeed the person who will read it. This is the case for small publishers – most of the time. But even small publishers get seasonally swamped and might well hire (sometimes on a temporary basis) someone to be a Reader for them.

A Reader could be the only person who ever looks at your submission. So you need to know who they are, what they do and what they want from us writers.

What the Reader does for a publisher.

Readers do exactly what the title suggests: they read. So what this gets down to in the publishing world is that they go through the submissions, one at a time. It could be hundreds or even thousands.

Trust me when I tell you that being a Reader is no get-rich-quick opportunity. It's for people who love to read and who can do it both quickly and well. A Reader is also expected to have excellent grammar and spelling skills and a good understanding of what makes a good yarn.

Readers may or may not be aspiring writers. In my personal experience in talking to Readers, not one was ever interested in being a writer some day. But they have all been interested in the publishing world and in books.

Readers are book lovers. That's why you should love them.

What Bugs Readers

Talk to any Reader, and you'll quickly appreciate how much that person has sacrificed in the name of a good book – or of looking desperately for one, at any rate.

What Gets a Submission Deleted, Unread

These are the common mistakes that get most submissions tossed without being actually read.

Poor grammar and spelling are just the beginning.

This is the first reason that will get your submission deleted – actually, your submission will get deleted without anyone ever peaking at your manuscript even once if you have a poorly written cover letter (or email).

Sending a type of story the publisher would never publish is a big no-no.

Shockingly, this seems to happen a lot. I mean *really a lot*. If a publisher only publishes nonfiction, then do not (please, seriously) submit your urban fantasy novel their way. It befuddles them just enough to toss your submission unread.

Send the story to the wrong division.

Your manuscript will never be forwarded to the correct division, attention the person who will love what you've written. That never happens. It will just get deleted, because publishers only consider writers who have done their homework and who know where to send their stuff.

No, not even if you're a Big Shot. VIPs have agents who do the submitting and pitching.

Don't follow the Submissions Guidelines.

According to every Acquisitions Editor I've spoken with, this happens a lot. Whatever they ask for, give

it to them. Do not send more; do not send less. I've made this mistake myself. It isn't enough to get blacklisted, but it is enough to get dismissed.

(What can I say? Sometimes I have to learn the hard way. Ahem.)

Express how your kids or grandkids or reading group absolutely love the story.

If you don't have a publishing credit (read: you don't have a successful publishing credit) to mention in a cover letter, there is a tendency to want to fill that space with something nice, some sort of social proof. Don't.

You really do not have to supply social proof for an unpublished manuscript. It's nice if you have a reputation, but that isn't what will make a publisher decide to publish whatever you've sent their way.

What's Blacklist-Worthy

The above mistakes, common as they are, will just get your manuscript deleted without anyone having ever read it. There are worse things we writers are known to do, and these are the things that get us remembered for all the wrong reasons.

Call the office and ask why you haven't heard from them yet.

If you actually call a publisher (or an agent) and demand to know why you haven't heard back from anyone about your manuscript, this is like shooting yourself in a place that will cause you to have no chance of being published. Don't do it.

Why this is a serious faux pas: it shows a complete lack of understanding for how the business works. It also displays a lack of respect for the incredibly overwhelming piles of work a publisher must do.

If you want to be blacklisted, call the publisher and bug them about your manuscript.

In the cover letter, brag about how great you are and how insanely stupid the publisher would be to not publish your brilliant, sure-to-be-a-blockbuster manuscript.

I'm not joking, actually. Several Readers have told me that this type of haughty email is something they've seen more than once. Speaking just for myself, there is nothing that would make me want to work with someone less than an immense ego display like that.

What gets you considered seriously.

Publishers (read: editors and readers), upon first looking at your submission's cover letter, want to know that you can write and that you're not crazy. That's about it, in terms of *how not to get deleted*.

If you can also express in a compelling way who your protagonist is and what your story is about, you'll *just be good enough to get them to read a bit of your manuscript*.

When your submittal is good enough that they *read it to the end*, they'll think about asking for more (if it's a novel, for example). They'll read your complete manuscript. You probably won't know exactly who is reading it.

That's when you'll hopefully hear back with great news: either that your manuscript is going to be published or that it's *maybe* going to be published - once it's cleared by either a VIP in the firm (sometimes the Owner) or a group of [Acquisitions Editors](#) (who then have a vote).

Don't Sweat It (not too much, anyway)

Submitting a manuscript to a publisher isn't unlike sending in a resume for a job. It's very similar, really.

- You should respect the other person considering you for the job.
- Be sure what you send them is the proper format, the industry standard.
- You should know about the company where you want to work and have a clear understanding of where you can really add something of value to what they're already doing.

Don't be paralyzed by the closed door of a publishing company. That door has a handle, so just get a handle on it. Learn what you can about the publisher, be sure they really suit your book project, and go from there.

I'll be delving into these next steps over the next several weeks. So if you've got questions about any of it, this is a good time to ask. What do you want to know about the publishing process or about submission expectations? Write below, let me know – or as ever, send me an email.

Keep creating, no matter what.

This entry is part of the series

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