Short Stories and Poetry

Publishing Collections
Whilst getting a novel published is hard, any poet or short story writer will tell you that getting collections of short works into print is even harder. A smaller readership and fewer houses willing to publish poetry and short stories make this industry very competitive. If you’ve got a book of poems or short stories, keep an eye out for small presses that are more likely to be looking for poetry and short fiction anthologies.

You can find Australian small presses through the Small Press Underground Networking Community (SPUNC) or listed under Publishers in the Australian Writers’ Marketplace. The Australian Society of Authors also sells a short paper on Writing for the Poetry Market.

However, the Queensland Writers’ Centre advises that short fiction and poetry publishers are unlikely to consider publishing an anthology unless at least 50% of the work has previously appeared in magazines, journals or anthologies, or has won competitions.

Magazines and Journals
It’s far more likely that you’ll be successful publishing your short stories and poems individually in literary journals. The number of literary journals in Australian circulation is growing all the time. Australian writers have access to both new and established journals here and overseas that specialise in fiction, poetry, haiku, literary writing, fantasy, science fiction, horror, crime, new and innovative writing, writing by young people and more.

Many journals recommend reading a few issues before submitting, to see if your style of writing will fit in with their content. The NSW Writers’ Centre has a comprehensive collection of literary journals in our members’ library. Members can make an appointment to browse our collection. Phone (02) 9555 9757.

Identify the magazines and journals that publish writing of a similar style/genre to your own and subscribe to them. Identify trends in editorial preferences and then send them appropriate work. Keep an eye out for changes in editorship. When a new editor takes over a magazine or journal they will often be looking for fresh new contributors – the perfect time for new or unestablished writers to submit their work.

Finding literary journals can often be a case of being constantly on the lookout. New magazines and journals are starting up all the time, looking for fresh words to fill their pages. Subscribe to newsletters of writers’ organisations and watch for submission callouts. The NSW Writers’ Centre has a free weekly electronic newsletter, Newsbite, with an entire section devoted to Opportunities for Writers.
The Australian Poetry Centre provides a database of publications for poets. Literary journals can also be found in the Australian Writers’ Marketplace under Magazines & Journals.

Competitions

Another great way to get your poetry or short stories recognised is to enter competitions. There are dozens of poetry and short story competitions run in Australia each year. You can hear about upcoming competition deadlines by subscribing to the NSW Writers’ Centre’s free weekly electronic newsletter, Newsbite.

Competition deadlines, as well as magazine/journal deadlines are also a good tool for motivating yourself to finish that next draft. It’s important to submit to as many journals and competitions as you can as selection processes will inevitably be subjective and depend upon the overall quality of submissions. It has often been the case that what was rejected for a small prize has been successful for a larger one, and vice versa. The key is persistence.

The Fellowship of Australian Writers publishes a short fact sheet Hints to Writers on Entering a Competition.

Submission Guidelines

Before submitting to a journal or competition, be sure to check the submission guidelines. Often a journal will not accept work that has been previously published. Different magazines have different policies on what is ‘published’ but this will often include publication in zines, the internet and personal websites. So it is important to consider whether you want your work to appear anywhere else before publishing it online.

Some journals will not accept work that is currently being considered elsewhere. To avoid inadvertently submitting the same work to multiple journals, keep a diary of your submissions to keep track of where your work has been sent.

Scams

Whilst writing competitions will normally charge a small fee for entry, both the Queensland Writers’ Centre and the NSW Writers’ Centre advises writers to be suspicious of any competitions or publications requesting money in order to see your work in print. Likewise, beware of journals that try to prevent you from publishing your work elsewhere after it has appeared in their publication. Journals can do this by purchasing the copyright of your work. However, the NSW Writers’ Centre does not recommend that you sell your copyright.

Be aware that some publications may ask for first publication rights. This is an acceptable industry practice. It will preclude you from publishing your work in another journal before it has gone to print in the journal purchasing first rights and may extend to a period of a few months after the journal has gone to print.

For information about acceptable entry fees for competitions, see the Australian Society of Authors’ free paper on Literary Competition Guidelines.
Payment for Publication

Literary journals with a wide circulation or government arts funding should pay Australian Society of Authors (ASA) standard rates for publishing short stories and poetry. However, many small, independent or fledgling journals and zines may be unable to offer ASA rates. If your work is published in a smaller literary journal or zine, it is not uncommon to receive little or no payment for your work. However, you should receive at least one free contributor copy of the publication. Whilst you may not receive payment, what you do receive from these publications is recognition of your work which you can then use to get into more established literary journals. You will also receive the satisfaction of seeing your name in print.

NSWWC Books

Australian Writers' Marketplace

Further Resources

Australian Poetry Centre <www.australianpoetrycentre.org.au>
Australian Society of Authors <www.asauthors.org>
Fellowship of Australian Writers <www.writers.asn.au>
Queensland Writers’ Centre <www.qwc.asn.au>
Poets Union <www.poetsunion.com>
Small Press Underground Networking Community <spunc.com.au>