

Write It. Sell It.

Getting Your Short Stories Published

Michael Bracken

Copywriting | Creative Writing | Editorial Services

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Bracken's Background

- Author of 16 books, including novels and short-story collections
- Author of 1,300+/- short stories
- Editor, *Black Cat Mystery Magazine*
- Editor, Nine published or forthcoming anthologies, including Anthony-Award nominated *The Eyes of Texas: Private Eyes from the Panhandle to the Piney Woods*
- Editor, *Texas Gardener*
- Editor, *Seeds*

Why Some Short-Story Writers Are Published More Often Than Others

- They Write More
- They Submit More
- They Don't Give Up

Write More

- Establish a routine
- Finish what you start

Submit More

- Submit everything you finish
- Submit to the top markets first
- Submit until there are no more markets
- Monitor the markets for new opportunities
- Submit again

Don't Give Up

- Don't give up on yourself
- Don't give up on your stories
- Don't give up

How to Write a Short Story

- That's somebody else's presentation, but:
- Master the basics:
 - Spelling and punctuation
 - Story structure
 - Manuscript format
 - Microsoft Word

How to Sell a Short Story

- Find a market
- Submit your story
- Wait *forever* for a response
- While waiting, write more stories

Find a Market

- At any given moment, there are hundreds of anthologies and periodicals seeking short stories
- Until you're well established, no editor will come looking for you. So, you must find them
- Start with the publications you read regularly
 - *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*
 - *Black Cat Mystery Magazine*
 - *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*

Find a Market, continued

- Examine the publications you should be reading regularly:
 - Black Beacon Books (anthologies)
 - Coffin Hop Press (anthologies)
 - Darkhouse Books (anthologies)
 - *Down & Out: The Magazine*
 - *EconoClash Review*
 - *Hoosier Noir*
 - *Mysterical-E*
 - *Mystery Weekly*
 - *Mystery Tribune*
 - *Switchblade*
 - *Thriller*
 - *Tough*
 - Level Best Books (anthologies)
- and many, many others

Find a Market, continued

- Join Facebook groups such as
 - OPEN CALL: Crime, Thriller, Mystery Markets
 - OPEN CALL: SCIENCE FICTION, FANTASY & PULP MARKETS
 - OPEN CALL: HORROR MARKETSand others
- Join writing organizations
 - Mystery Writers of America
 - Private Eye Writers of America
 - Short Mystery Fiction Society
 - Sisters in Crimeand others

Find a Market, continued

- Use your favorite search engine to search for
“call for submissions” AND mystery
“call for submissions” AND “crime fiction”
“submission guidelines” AND “short stories”
and similar search parameters
- Purchase annual best-of-year anthologies and discover
where the selected stories were first published
- Follow the Facebook and Twitter accounts of editors
- Follow the blogs and websites of editors

Find a Market, continued

- Follow prolific writers and learn where their work is published
- Make friends and share market information with each other

Submitting Short Stories

- Read and follow the submission guidelines
- Unless specifically instructed otherwise **PUT YOUR NAME, ADDRESS, TELEPHONE NUMBER, AND EMAIL ADDRESS ON THE FIRST PAGE OF YOUR MANUSCRIPT.**
- Unless specifically instructed otherwise, 12 pt. Times New Roman, double-spaced with no extra space between paragraphs. Indent paragraphs $\frac{1}{2}$ " using the paragraph formatting function in Word.
- Unless specifically instructed otherwise, put a header on your pages that includes your name, story title, and page #.

Manuscript Format

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approx. 2,600 words

SLEEPY RIVER

By Michael Bracken

Sleepy River flowed so slowly that a man of middling strength could paddle upstream without breaking a sweat. Sarah Jean, my best friend from up the hill, often sat with me on my family's dock, and we hung our feet in the river, letting the cool water flow between our toes. We wanted to go swimming, but Mama said we was too old for skinny dipping. Didn't neither of us have a fancy store-bought bathing suit, and our jeans wasn't so tore up that our mamas would let us cut off the legs. So, we satisfied ourselves by rolling the cuffs nearly to our knees and kicking at the water with our bare feet.

My mama wouldn't visit the dock, saying it brought back too many memories of all the evenings she and my daddy sat and done just what Sarah Jean and I did. So, the dock had fallen into disrepair following my daddy's passing. Several of the deck boards was loose, and the down-river end of the fifth one would spring up if you stomped on the upriver end. Still, it was in good enough shape to keep my daddy's canoe tied up to it.

MICHAEL BRACKEN/SLEEPY RIVER/PAGE 2

Sarah Jean and me been meeting every afternoon since the end of the school year—either at Sarah Jean's place or mine—after we finished our chores. When we met at her place, we went traipsing through the woods behind her house. When we met at mine, we explored the riverbank or sat on the dock or took my daddy's canoe across the river to visit his favorite fishing hole. The only variation in our summer routine was the weekly church meetings, when our mamas made us wear our Easter dresses to attend the Right Reverend Billy Caulfield's Sunday morning river baptisms. I'd already been baptized seven times and Sarah Jean five, just to ensure that the Lord remained in our hearts.

One afternoon, exasperated with boredom as we sat on the dock, I flung myself onto my back, spread my arms dramatically, and said, "We're going to die of old age before anything interesting ever happens around here."

That's when Sarah Jean told me about a bank robbery over in Smithville the previous day. She overheard her daddy telling her mama what he'd heard at Clem's Bait & Tackle in Templeton where he repaired outboard motors for local fishermen and did other odd jobs for Mr. Clem. Seems that a pair of masked gunmen had stolen near-on sixty thousand dollars and beat hell for leather in a banged up old Ford driven by a third man. The robbery couldn't have happened to a more deserving bunch of blood suckers. The Smithville Bank & Trust had been repossessing homes up and down the river after the mill closing threw people out of work.

END

Approaching Editors

- Editors are not your friends. Yet
- Be professional in every encounter
- Your cover letter is likely your first contact
 - Keep it simple
 - Tell the editor what's enclosed (if using snail mail) or what's attached (if using email)
 - Include a brief note about your previous sales, if any
 - Include a brief mention of any connection you may have with the editor
 - Conclude appropriately

Approaching Editors, continued

- Simple cover letter:

Dear Mr. Bracken,

Attached is “Hippy Homicide,” a 3,000-word P.I. story that may be appropriate for your upcoming anthology *Groovy Gumshoes*.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Ima Writer

Approaching Editors, continued

- More detailed cover letter:

Dear Mr. Bracken,

Attached is “Hippy Homicide,” a 3,000-word P.I. story that may be appropriate for your upcoming anthology *Groovy Gumshoes*.

My stories have appeared in *Alfred Hitchcock’s Mystery Magazine* and two Bouchercon anthologies.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Ima Writer

Approaching Editors, continued

- More complex cover letter:

Dear Mr. Bracken,

Attached is “Hippy Homicide,” a 3,000-word P.I. story that may be appropriate for your upcoming anthology *Groovy Gumshoes*.

I learned of your open-call anthology during your Zoom presentation with *Malice in Memphis*, and I appreciate your willingness to read submissions from new writers.

My stories have appeared in *Alfred Hitchcock’s Mystery Magazine* and two Bouchercon anthologies.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Ima Writer

Approaching Editors, continued

- As you gain more experience, develop relationships with editors, and add to your list of published stories, your cover letters may become more casual
- But *never* unprofessional

Approaching Editors, continued

- When encountering editors in the real world—conferences, conventions, and Zoom meetings—the same rules apply:
- Be professional
 - Don't be drunk
 - Don't be high
 - Don't be rude
 - Don't do anything that would embarrass your mother if she heard about it
- Treat writers with the same level of professionalism
 - Someday, they might be editors

Working With Editors

- **CHECK YOUR SPAM FOLDER EVERY DAY**
- Respond promptly to every email that requires a response
 - Rejections don't require a response
- If an editor requests a revision, do it
 - If you disagree with any part of it, discuss the requested change(s) with the editor
- Sign and return contracts promptly
 - Don't ask your editor to explain your contract
- Read, correct, and return copyedits and page proofs promptly

Turn One Sale into Many

- Study your sales
 - Determine why an editor accepted your story
 - Use that knowledge to guide future submissions
- Establish a working relationship with your editors
 - Be professional
 - Ask questions
 - Be dependable
 - Follow directions
 - Meet deadlines
 - Be open to opportunities

Turn One Sale into Many, continued

- Leverage your ideas
 - Series characters
 - Reusable settings
 - Holiday lists
 - Reusable premises

Random Tips

- Aim for 3,500 words
 - This is at the long end for publications that seek short short stories
 - This is at the short end for publications that seek long short stories
 - This is only a guideline, not a rule
- Don't limit yourself to a single genre
 - You might never discover what you're best at
- Only two people need to like your story:
 - You
 - The editor who publishes it
- Don't give up. Don't ever give up