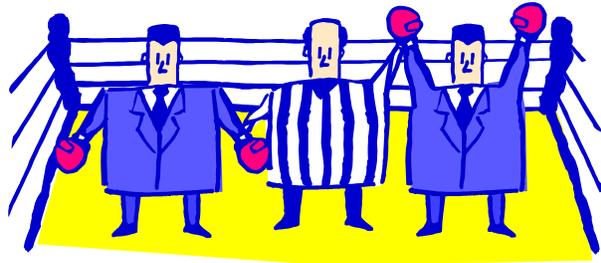


What If?



Five Steps to a Successful Contest Entry

Editors are strange people. I can say that with impunity because I am one.

I can however, state with reasonable certainty that we are all human beings. As such we have our personal likes and dislikes, which we try to set aside, with varying degrees of success, often contingent on what kind of day we're having and whether Jupiter is rising or falling in our particular zodiac sign.

There are however a few things you can do to ensure your contest entry gets a fair review.

1. MAKE SURE YOUR ENTRY ARRIVES BEFORE THE CONTEST CLOSES. Deadlines are in place because the editor has deadlines too. Chances are very good that a late entry will not even be read.

2. INCLUDE COMPLETE CONTACT INFORMATION. If you enter by mail you must include a self-address stamped envelope (SASE). Editors will not pay for a stamp and envelope to return your story or a rejection notice. If you enter by e-mail you should find out if they will accept attachments. If not your story may be deleted without a response. In both cases send complete information which includes name, address (mail and e-mail) and telephone number. Some editors may have specific requirements as well. For example, What If?'s contests are for writers 19 and under so we need your age included. You may have the best entry but if you can't be contacted I'll move on.

3. MAKE YOUR ENTRY LEGIBLE. Don't use fancy fonts or submit hand written material. Times New Roman or Arial fonts in 12 pt. double spaced is ideal. If you are e-mailing never use colours, symbols or moving characters. It is distracting and the delete button is a click away.

4. MAKE YOUR ENTRY LOOK PROFESSIONAL. Include a cover letter with a brief description of your story. Include any previous publishing credits or relevant information to your writing. Remember, an editor may receive hundreds of entries. An entry that is professional and easy to understand will get a closer review.

5. WATCH YOUR SPELLING AND GRAMMAR. I know for a fact there are editors who automatically reject an entry that contains even a few mistakes. You are entering a contest to win a prize. Whether it is monetary or simply the honour of being published an editor expects you to take that seriously and at least Spell Check your material. That little red line serves a purpose. Grammar may be harder to catch. I've never found a grammar check program that I like but there is a method that might help. Read aloud. Find a private spot and read your entry as if you had an audience. Chances are, the areas your tongue trips over are areas that need a second look.

If you follow these five simple steps, unfortunately there is still no guarantee you will win. The quality of your material will determine that. What you are guaranteed is that your entry will be read and treated with the respect it deserves.