

Short Story Submission Guidelines

Julie Czerneda - Last Updated April 2010

These guidelines do two things. Make my life easier, as editor, and, I hope, put your mind at ease in terms of how to prepare a story for submission to one of my anthologies.

The Process

I maintain a list of authors who've contacted me to be invited to submit a story to my next anthology. If you want to be on that list, simply email me your preference: science fiction or fantasy. (I don't edit horror.) **Do not send me a story.** Please tell me if you are a published author or not. Why? Because I reserve one story slot for a new author in each anthology, so you want to be considered for that if it applies.

Over the past decade, I've averaged an anthology/year. Whether I have one upcoming depends on whether I've sold an idea and my own writing schedule. I love editing them, however, so it's a good bet there's more to come.

The Invitation

The first step in the process is for me to have an anthology to fill. Assuming I do, and you're on my list, the next step? You'll receive an invitation.

An invitation to submit a story is not a guarantee I will buy it.

My responsibility is to the readers of the anthology and to the theme. I've rejected many wonderful stories, including those by well known authors. (There's something of an informal social club of "I was rejected by Julie too!" authors who love to tease me at cons.) If I don't buy your story, I will explain why and try to suggest an alternate market.

How many authors are invited?

For an anthology that will have 14 stories, I'll invite 20 to 30 authors. Why invite more than I'll need? The reality is that 1/3 of those I do invite will be unable or unwilling to write a story. Of those who do, some I'll have to reject. So you can see it's important to cast a slightly wider net.

For the "new author slot," I usually invite all the new authors who have contacted me or whom I've met at my workshops. All of those stories compete for the slot. You'd think this would be a huge number. Alas, no. In the past I've received as few as five stories, so your odds aren't bad at all. This would be blatant encouragement, Dear Newbie Folks. I'm trying to help. Let me.

Here's the invitation I sent out for *Mis-Spelled*.

Dear Author

I would like to invite you to submit a fantasy story for my anthology, *Mis-Spelled*, to be published by DAW Books in 2007.

Mis-Spelled

In the real world, recipes flop, computers have bugs, and the best-laid plans of anyone can fall apart if you forget that one little detail. At least the world doesn't end. Right?

Oh, but in fantasy realms, the result of a mistake in magic can be far worse than a flat soufflé, lost file, or missed appointment. Missing an ingredient? Substitute at your peril. Forget to lock the door? Beware the uninvited guest. And who really remembers all the words to an incantation under stress?

*Join our talented authors as they reveal the harrowing, and other, consequences of having *Mis-Spelled*.*

I'm looking for original fantasy stories of approximately 2 500 - 5 000 words, and can offer \$0.XX per word for our usual rights (the non-exclusive right to include your story in all editions of this anthology, in all formats, in all languages, and in all territories throughout the world). This amount will be an advance against a share of fifty percent of all monies received by us for this book (the fifty percent share allocated to the authors shall be divided on the basis of the number of stories in the book, regardless of their length).

Stories should come to me by June 1st, 2006, attached as a file to e-mail. (Any word processing software is fine, though I work in MSWord.)

Please let me know if you're interested in submitting a story. I hope you are!

What constitutes “original” for a submitted story?

Never before published. That includes being posted online.

Submitting Your Story

Once you've received the invitation, and have told me you'll write a story, the next step is for you to write it. Please don't contact me about your story during this stage -- this is your part of the job and it wouldn't be fair to the other writers for me to consult with any one.

When you're satisfied, check the deadline for submission and send me your story.

Submission Tips:

1. Word Count. Do your best to write within the one specified. Plus or minus 300 words isn't a problem. Anything further off, ask me before sending.
 2. Before declaring your story done, check the following:
 - Does the plot wrap up at the end, without character abandonment, missed threads, or wee bits left in closets?
 - Is the story complete in itself, i.e. doesn't read like the beginning of a novel or the cliffhanger ending of something else?
 3. General Format Preferences*:
 - No title page
 - Header: "Story Title" and Your Name on the left, page number on the right
 - Title, Your Name, Email, and Word Count at the top of the first page.
 - Font: Times New Roman, 12 pt.
 - Double space. Normal/default margins (1.25" each side, 1" top and bottom)
 - Show italics as italics, not underline.
 - If you are comfortable with styles, then apply an indent to all but the first paragraph of each scene. If not, please tab rather than using multiple spaces.
- * FYI. This is how I must submit the final anthology, with all stories in one file, so if you haven't supplied your story in this format, I'll need to change it anyway.
4. Submissions should be sent by email to me as an attached document. I use MSWord, but can handle most stuff. I will acknowledge having received it. Please do not use the automated receipt function on your email. I won't let it answer for me.
 5. Before emailing me your story, please check the following:
 - Did you put your real full name, mailing address (for contracts), and story title in the body of your email?
 - If you wish to use a pseudonym for your story, have you given me both names and made which is which clear? (If new to writing and wondering about this, my advice is to use your own name.)
 - Did you put your name, word count, and story title at the start of your story?
 - Take another look at the invitation. Does your story still suit the stated theme? Be sure! It's astonishing how things can change during the writing process.

Deadlines

There are usually four. The first, for your response to the invitation. The second, for submission of a story. The third is for any revisions. The fourth comes if your story was bought for the anthology. You'll receive your pages to check over before publication.

Deadlines matter. Contact me if you anticipate a problem meeting one of mine. There may -- or may not -- be a way I can help. If I haven't heard, and you miss the deadline, I won't consider your story.

Be honest with yourself too. If the deadline for a particular anthology is at a perfectly rotten time for you, ask to be invited to another.

Final Word

I would never reject a story for format issues or typos. My first and quickest rejection is based on content and quality. Does the story fit the theme? Is it well told? Next, if I still have more great stories than I can buy, I consider which will make the best mix of stories for the anthology as a whole. Length can be a factor here. Two stories of equal quality, but one twice as long? I'd likely take the shorter one, which would allow me to buy another story.

I understand the disappointment of being rejected and sincerely dislike that part of my job. Do realize it isn't about you -- and it isn't necessarily about your story. In many cases, stories are fine, just not a good fit to a particular theme.

Last, but not least, if I send you an invitation, give it a try! At the very least, you'll learn about the process. At the very best?

I look forward to telling you how much I love your work and sharing it with the world.

- Julie Czerneda

Final and Flippant Words

Weird things happen to us all. Here are my favourite "oopsies" from editing anthologies.

- * Emails arrive without a story attached. (Which I do all the time.)
- * I hit reply and the email bounces, isn't that person's, the inbox is full etc.
- * Stories arrive without a name and, oh yes, replying to the email doesn't work.
- * The attached story not only isn't about the theme, it prominently features Elvis. (Yes, that's happened. Don't ask me why.)
- * An invited author never replies to me and reveals later they didn't believe I meant it. (Variations on this include a story I wanted to buy, but the author didn't believe I meant it. A story I wanted with a minor revision, but the author didn't believe I meant it. Etc. Trust me!)
- * The attached story is missing that certain something, such as the last five pages. Yes, the author sent an early, unfinished copy.
- * The attached story is a math assignment. (The author sent me the son's homework and the story to the teacher. I can only imagine the faces.)

Relax, write, check the details. Above all, have fun.