31 GREAT PLACES TO PUBLISH PERSONAL ESSAYS

MEGHAN WARD
31 Great Places to Publish Personal Essays

In 2011, I wrote a blog post called 20 Great Places to Publish Personal Essays. That post was so popular (even mentioned on The Atlantic.com) that five years later I have decided to update and expand the list for 2016. This is by no means a comprehensive list, and I would love to hear any other suggestions you have for the next version of this book, but for all of you out there who have written wonderful stories about that time Aunt Harriet came for dinner and left on the back of the boss’s motorcycle, or the time your cat disappeared and returned six years later, or the time you had an epiphany about the true meaning of marriage while walking through the woods, this book is for you.

If you’re looking to learn HOW to write a personal essay and you’re in the San Francisco Bay Area, check out the San Francisco Writers’ Grotto’s list of upcoming classes. If you’re not in the Bay Area, here are some tips from author Laura Fraser, co-founder of Shebooks.net, who teaches personal essay classes at The Grotto.

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The Miracle and the Monster
By Laura Fraser

Writing a personal essay is an act of courage. There is no point to writing an essay about your life unless it contains a hard-won truth that will change the mind, mood, or perspective of your reader. Digging into your own life until you reach that truth can be messy and uncomfortable, and often it is only through the process of writing and rewriting that you can reveal what’s at the very heart of the situation you’re describing.

Michel de Montaigne, perhaps the father of the personal essay, wrote, “I have never seen no greater monster nor miracle than myself.” The personal essay has to identify the monster within us, and accomplish the miracle of transformation, through understanding and enlightenment. You have to track down the monster inside you, and worse, reveal it to the reader, and then describe how you set out to slay it. The transformation from monster to miracle is what makes your life interesting to a reader. A personal essay, above all, is not about you—it is about the story.

Every personal essay must establish some kind of intimacy with the reader, through a persona the reader can trust. Lots of beginning writers make the mistake of trying to be admirable or perfect, lecturing or academic, and nothing could be more boring. You have to be you, warts and all, but an engaging you. You must be honest, but not drag us down with self-pity, emotional rants, or too much detail. Every word in your essay that doesn’t have something to do with the story—rather than just with you—has to be cut. You are the protagonist in a story. We care about you, the character, and your role in the story. We don’t actually care about you. Sorry.

The biggest sins in personal essay are narcissism, whining, and trying to make yourself look good. In order to write a compelling personal essay, you have to be willing to look bad, to stare down that monster within you. But you have to be an engaging enough monster that we care that you will find the miracle in yourself. It’s not easy, but it’s what makes us care.

Every personal essay is a story. In the beginning, we need to understand the stakes. What do you desire? What do you stand to lose? What’s the problem? Then you have to overcome some challenges while you are trying to sort out the stakes. Those challenges can be internal or external, or both—you are fighting your fear while you are slaying the monster. The essay builds to a turning point—a realization, an epiphany. This shouldn’t be obvious, as in, “And then, I realized!” but something that comes naturally from the build-up of events and the uncovering of the truths you are digging into. Still, it hits the reader as a surprise. And then the ending has to have some kind of a twist, which I call releasing the reader back into the world.

One of the great things about the Internet is that more and more of us are able to share our personal stories. There is an ever-increasing number of venues for personal essays, which Meghan Ward has tracked down. Don’t be put off if you send your first personal essay to Modern Love at the New York Times and don’t get it published. There are many other places where you can practice and polish the art of the personal essay—and thanks to Meghan for telling us where.
The List
NOTE: When a publication’s website did not list how much it pays for essays, I used Manjula Martin’s Who Pays Writers blog to search what writers have been paid in recent months by that publication. This is indicated by WPWR (Who Pays Writers Report) at the end of the listing. Feel free to do your own searches on Who Pays Writers.

The Bold Italic
The Bold Italic is an online magazine based in San Francisco, and it’s always looking for contributors. From the website: “The Bold Italic publishes first person stories by locals on issues and topics that are on the brains and lips of San Franciscans.” Email info@thebolditalic.com with some information about yourself, a couple sample story ideas, and some clips showing your personal essay/opinion/humor style. WPWR: $150–$300

The Boston Globe Magazine
The Boston Globe Magazine seeks 800-word essays on a timely news topic for its Perspective column and 650-word first-person essays on relationships of any kind (“romantic as well as those between friends, siblings, and parents and children”) for its Connections column. It pays, though how much is unclear. Submit to magazine@globe.com with “Query” in the subject line or mail to Veronica Chao, editor, The Boston Globe Magazine, PO Box 55819, Boston, MA 02205-5819. It pays, though how much is unclear. WPWR: $75 for a 500-1000-word essay

The Boston Review
The Boston Review accepts both query letters and complete nonfiction submissions up to 5000 words through its online submission system. Be sure to read the submission guidelines first. WPWR: $300

Brain, Child
The magazine for thinking mothers publishes essays between 800 and 4500 words, which are “the signature pieces of the magazine.” They pay "as much as we can, although our fees are still modest for now." View their writers’ guidelines. No pay.

BuzzFeed
BuzzFeed has many different sections that publish personal essays, including News, Life and Ideas. My friend Christine Hyung-Oak Lee wrote an essay titled “I Had a Stroke at 33” for BuzzFeed News that went viral and led to a two-book deal. To try your hand at a BuzzFeed essay, check out:
How to pitch to **BuzzFeed Ideas**
How to pitch to **BuzzFeed Life**

Ideas tends to focus on news-related topics like culture, race and gender while Life covers more specific areas like food, style, health, DIY, travel, and parenting. If your essay fits more than one category, it’s up to you to decide which section to pitch. If you want to pitch other sections, like Books or LGBT, you should address your submissions to those editors. WPWR: $100-$200.

**Chicken Soup for the Soul**
After 250 books, it doesn’t seem like there’s anything left to publish in this series, but there is! They take stories up to 1200 words. Check out the list of their [upcoming book topics](#). And here are the [submission guidelines](#). Pay: $200 per published story.

**The Christian Science Monitor**
The *Christian Science Monitor* is a highly respected international newspaper and is—despite its title—not religious-based. Its Home Forum page includes a personal essay that can run from 400 to 800 words. After you read the Monitor’s [contributor guidelines](#), check out [this article](#) for advice on how to beat the odds of getting your essay published. Pay: $200–$225.

**The Common**
The Common is a biannual print and digital literary journal based in Massachussetts. Its mission is to be “an essential destination for creative work that embodies particular times and places, both real and imagined.” The Common Online publishes original content four times a week, including personal essays. Read the [submission guidelines](#) before you submit your work. No pay.

**Full Grown People**
Full Grown People is a literary journal that publishes personal essays with a literary quality and between 800 and 4000 words about what it means to be an adult. Essay should be “engaging and smart without being academic or schmaltzy.” Read the submission guidelines here before emailing your work to submissions@fullgrownpeople.com. No pay.

**Granta**
A British literary magazine, *Granta* publishes original memoir pieces between 3000 and 6000 words. They do not accept e-mail submissions. Read a few copies of the
journal (you can find most journals at a library) and then read their submit your essay. Pay: $1/word.

**L.A. Times L.A. Affairs**
In addition to its op-ed page, the L.A. Times has L.A. Affairs, a column about the dating scene in and around Los Angeles “and finding romance in a wired world.” Submissions should be between 800 and 900 words and have taken place in the present day. Email questions and submissions to home@latimes.com. For more information, see their submission guidelines. Pay: $300 for a published column.

**L.A. Times Op-Eds**
To submit an op-ed to the L.A. Times, first read the Op-Ed, explained. Email oped@latimes.com and include your name followed by the topic of your op-ed in the subject line. Then paste the body of the text in the email.

**Literary Mama**
An online literary magazine "for the maternally inclined," Literary Mama is looking for "revelation so stark that it hurts. Pathos can reveal, but so can humor and joy; superior craft (clarity, concrete details, strong narrative development); and ambiguity, complexity, depth, thoughtfulness, delicacy, humor, irreverence, lyricism, sincerity; the elegant and the raw." View their submission guidelines for more info. No pay.

**Luna Luna**
Luna Luna Magazine is “a hybrid lifestyle magazine, dreamer's diary and arts journal. You’ll find everything from sexuality and the occult to wild women and mindful living.” Their goal is to provide “a publishing space for everyone, from all walks of life - especially women, people of color, disabled people, trans people and the the LGBTQIA community." Email your pitch or essay (pasted into the body of the email) to lunalunasubmit@gmail.com. But first read their submission guidelines. No pay.

**Marie Claire US**
Marie Claire's focus is beauty tips, celebrities and career advice, but they accept personal essays, too. Send a query letter (not a completed essay) and clips of your previously published work to Jessica Pels at jpels@hearst.com or by snail mail to the magazine. For more information, read the submission guidelines. WPWR: $2 per word "but takes forever to get paid."
**Narrative Magazine**

I’m reluctant to include Narrative Magazine on this list because they charge a submission fee, but here’s a list of categories, including Readers’ Narratives, which can be essays of up to 1500 words (Read the fine print, though. They prefer you DON’T submit first-person memoir-style essays). Submission fee is $23. If you do choose to submit, read the submission guidelines before you submit your work. Pay: $100 for Readers’ Narratives.

**New York Times Modern Love**

Start by reading a lot of Modern Love columns to get an idea of what they’re looking for. You may even want to buy this Modern Love collection. Don’t miss the Media Bistro article on how to turn your Modern Love column into a book, and be sure to visit the Modern Love Facebook Page for submission tips from the editor, Daniel Jones. Pay: $300.

**New York Times Opinionator Blog**


Here are descriptions of each Opinionator series:

- **The Stone** is a forum for contemporary philosophers and other thinkers on issues both timely and timeless.
- **Fixes** looks at solutions to social problems and why they work.
- **Private Lives**: Personal essays on the news of the world and the news of our lives.
- **The End** is a series about end-of-life issues.
- **Couch** is a series about psychotherapy.

**O, The Oprah Magazine**

The focus of O Magazine is on personal growth, beauty/style and health/wellness. And with a circulation of 2.4 million, it is one of the heavy hitters of the newstand. Here is its 2016 editorial calendar, but I can’t for the life of me find any submission guidelines on the website. If you have any contacts at O, please email it to me so I can update this listing. Pay not listed, but likely $1–2/word.
**Ozy**

Ozy is a great online magazine that publishes essays of up to 800 words in its True Stories section. According to its website, “Every morning, we set out to profile the people, places, trends and technology that are ahead of their time and worthy of yours.” To submit, email freelancers@ozy.com. Pay: $250–$350.

**The Rumpus**

An online culture magazine, *The Rumpus* “[tries] to maintain high standards even though we don’t have any money and can’t pay for writing.” For details on submitting essays or book reviews, see their [writer’s guidelines](#). No pay.

**Salon**

The pay is low for *Salon* essays but it’s a great way to get exposure. Check out [these great essays](#) to get an idea of what they’re looking for, and then see their [submission guidelines](#), and address your pitch to the appropriate *Salon* editor. Pay: $100–$200.

**Skirt!**

An online women’s magazine, *Skirt!* Publishes two personal essays 800-1100 words every month on topics relating to women and women’s issues. While submissions are accepted year-round, they must fit the theme of the month they run. Check out the 2016 list of [upcoming themes](#). Then send your manuscript via e-mail to submissions@skirt.com with a two-sentence bio pasted at the end. Pay: $200.

**Slate**

To quote their submissions guidelines: “Unsolicited articles should be emailed to slateoffice@slate.com with “article submission” in the subject line. We regret that we cannot respond to every submission.” WPWR: $350 for a 500–1000-word essay in 2014.

**Slice**

Slice is a Brooklyn-based print magazine that “aims to bridge the gap between emerging and established authors by offering a space where both are published side-by-side.” Pulitzer Prize-winning author Junot Diaz says of Slice, “Beautiful, compelling, irresistible: *Slice* will knock you right out. In the best way possible.” Maximum word count is 5000. Read the [submission guidelines](#) for more information before you submit your work. Pay: $250 for essays.
Sun Magazine
A monthly magazine, The Sun only accepts submissions by snail mail. (Submissions should be typed, double-spaced, and accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.) They receive a thousand submissions (including fiction and poetry) for every issue, so don’t be surprised if you have to wait several months for a response. Pay: $300–$2,500 for nonfiction and $1,000–$2,000 for interviews.

Tin House
A literary journal, Tin House accepts stories, essays and poems up to 10,000 words from Sept. 1 to February 28. See their submission guidelines for more information and to learn for which issues they are accepting submissions (NOTE: As of April 1, 2016 their website was out of date and only displayed past due deadlines.) Pay: varies.

Travelers’ Tales
The Travelers’ Tales submission guidelines page is quite out of date, so it’s not clear which anthologies are currently accepting submissions. However, if you have a great travel story, you can submit it year-round using this form. Pay: $100. Also check out the Solas Awards Best Travel Writing contest sponsored by Travelers’ Tales. The deadline for the 11th annual Solas Awards is September 21, 2016. First prize wins $1000.

VerbSap
VerbSap is an online literary journal that accepts fiction, poetry and essays up to 3000 words. They are looking for “Stories with strong plots and vivid characters; clarity; research; originality; focus; stories that make us weep; stories that make us laugh; depictions of human frailty; depictions of human resilience; absurdity.” Read their submission guidelines for more information. No pay.

xoJane
xoJane is always looking for new writers and is particularly interested in “personal stories told from a raw, honest perspective.” More info: “It helps to always be brutally honest and radically transparent. Don’t fake anything. xoJane is not snarky, but inclusive and uplifting, while remaining nothing but honest at all times. Like Sassy and Jane before it, xoJane.com is written by a group of women...with strong voices, identities and opinions, many in direct opposition to each other, who are living what they are writing about.” For more information on what and where to pitch, read the submissions guidelines. Pay: $50–$200 for a personal essay of 1000-2000 words.
Zyzzyva
You have to live on the West Coast to publishing in Zyzzyva, but it's another literary journal that accepts personal essays. The best way to learn what any publication is looking for is to read several issues of that publication, and Zyzzyva is no exception. Start by buying a copy or a subscription. Then read the submission guidelines. From Oscar Villalon, the managing editor: We define the West Coast as California, Oregon, Washington, Alaska, and Hawaii. No pay.