

The Writer Within – Embolden Your Writer with a Plan

Article Six: Keep Track of What You’ve Written

By Janice Alonso

Organizing what you’ve written is as important as *what* you’ve written. As your writing credits grow, you’ll need a system that allows you to keep track of each story’s history and gives you the ability to locate a story quickly.

Years ago I submitted a Christmas story about teaching my sons the spirit of giving rather than of receiving through the use of an Advent calendar. I selected ten potential markets and sent the story out. All ten came back unaccepted. Months later I received an email from an editor from one of those magazines. He asked if I was the Janice Alonso who’d submitted an article about an Advent calendar. I checked the story’s folder and found the form letter that had accompanied my returned manuscript. I scanned the form rejection and answered his email with the letter attached. That same afternoon he responded requesting that I please resubmit my story to him directly. I did and, in a light, friendly tone, added that I had several more stories he’d rejected if he’d like those as well. He liked my attempt at humor but answered that he thought the one would work just fine.

The magazine used my story. Because I’d kept a history of this story’s submission process, I was able to reply in a quick and professional manner. I’d impressed upon this editor that I was a serious author and one who’d work with him in whatever way he needed.

My organizational system is simple. I make a folder for each of my stories (one on the computer and a hard copy in a hanging file). Just as a budding story needs a strong foundation and a title, it needs a place to call its own. Each folder initially contains three documents: the story itself at whatever stage it may be in the writing process, a page with the story’s marketing plan, and another page with a tracking record of where and when it has been submitted or will be submitted. The marketing plan page looks like this:

Marketing Plan

“Turtle Steps”

1. Christian Online Magazine
2. The Gem
3. The Lutheran Digest

I usually have five to ten possible markets in mind as I am writing a story. I select these markets during my research time before I begin the piece. Many times I'll add other possible markets, or remove others I included at the outset, as the story progresses.

The third document is the tracking record page and it looks like this:

Tracking Record

“Turtle Steps”

Christian Online Magazine:

Date submitted:

Date returned:

The Gem:

Date submitted:

Date returned:

The Lutheran Digest:

Date submitted:

Date returned:

I add other information to the folder as the story develops and after it has been submitted, but for now these three documents are all that is necessary at this stage of the organizational process.

Because I have been so fortunate to have many publications, I've had to subdivide my folders. I have them divided by fiction and nonfiction, and then further categorized by genre. I use a color code for the hanging files. Inspirational writing is red, adult short fiction is blue, children's stories are yellow, and so on.

When I received the email from the editor about my story, I knew exactly where to go: Inspirational piece – red folder – “That's the Spirit!” Because of this record I also knew

the date I had submitted the story and the date on which it had been returned, along with the form rejection. I was able to respond as quickly as I read his email and provide him with all the information necessary...easy for me and impressive-looking to him.

Let's pause for a minute so I can reemphasize a point I wrote about in column one of series one ("Who Am I and Why Am I Qualified to write This Column?"). A good name and reputation are the two best tools a writer can have in his/her toolbox. Something about my returned manuscript impressed that editor so that he remembered my name. My guess? I had followed his guidelines and had presented a crisp, clean submission. Now I hoped to impress him even more by responding in a speedy and efficient manner. I am writing these columns in small, digestible segments ("What Is My Approach?" – series one, column two), but they are intended to go hand-in-hand and overlap and intertwine. If you haven't started reading from the beginning of these columns, I recommend you do so you can receive the full benefit of their purpose.

In columns seven and eight I will show you two stories that blossomed from the same idea.

Step Six: Create a folder for the story you are working on.