

## 14.

# Magazine Writing

What are the  
facts today?

HAVE YOU HAD a secret ambition to work on or for a home-centered magazine — perhaps not at present, but at some time in the future? Have you wondered what qualifications you would need, what talents you might develop, and how you might best approach an editor to sell yourself and your ideas?

Unfortunately there are no specific answers to that last question. If you analyze the problem thoughtfully, however, you will emerge with some such reasoning as this:

*Every magazine — particularly a magazine designed to appeal to homemakers — is put together by a staff of specialists to interest some specific group of readers. Therefore, if you hope to become a staff editor or an outside contributor, you, too, must be a specialist. That is the place to start your thinking.*

Now make a study of homemaking publications. Try to figure out the type of homemakers to which each publication hopes to appeal. Observe the mastheads of those magazines. Note the

*Magazine writing, like good family relations, is built on understanding. Before you attempt it, you must know the magazine's needs.*



**WHAT ABOUT  
PHOTOGRAPHS?**

In general, it's advisable not to invest money in commercial photographs unless you are reasonably sure that an editor is interested in your material. It is, however, sometimes good sense to send along a snapshot to show the editor exactly what your idea is about. If you are redoing some part of your home and hope to write a story about it later, do have "before" pictures made; then when the remodeling is completed, have the same photographer do "after" shots from exactly the same angle.

**FOR THE WRITE-MINDED**

If you want to write for magazines, look into the dozens of trade and industrial and religious and travel and local and other special-interest magazines which publish some material on homemaking. Study their editorial and advertising columns before submitting your manuscript.

How do you locate samples of such publications? By asking questions; by checking at the library; by keeping your eyes open; by following magazines that list potential markets for all types of articles.

long list of editors, contributing editors, and editorial assistants. Realize that some of these editors specialize in subject matter, as foods or equipment; others in art or photography or copy editing. Among the persons listed may be one or more who were hired because of their ability to produce new ideas, or to do a skillful job of interviewing.

The question now becomes how to fit you and/or your writing into that existing picture.

Let's say that you have a sound background in foods, and rightfully, consider yourself a food specialist. That's good, but it is no indication that what you write about foods will be published. Remember, the magazine you plan to approach already has a staff of qualified food editors.

"But," you may say, "I've specialized in foreign cookery." That's something of a specialty, but it may not be enough to interest an editor who probably receives a number of articles on foreign cookery during the year. If, however, you have narrowed down your study to short-cut American adaptations of foreign cookery, you may have a specialty that could conceivably appeal to the food editor of a home magazine.

In writing that editor — and you should always query an editor before submitting an article of any length — tell her briefly about your narrowed-down specialty. Describe in part your idea for an "Instant Smorgasbord"; your Americanized version of sukiyaki in which slices of Monterey Jack cheese are used in place of the traditional bean curd. Mention your recipe for Easy Way Chinese Fortune Cookies, and one or two other examples of the 15 or 20 recipes you have developed. State, finally, that you are a graduate home economist and have thoroughly tested your material.

Even though you have developed what you feel is a good, fresh idea, and even though you have written a good letter of query to the editor, you

may find that the editor is not interested, or that she is not able to use such an article due to the limits of space. But you will have proceeded in the professional way and can go on from there to approach another editor, or to reshape your idea, or to conceive another one.

### ***Another Way to Specialize***

Many free-lance writers specialize in digging out fresh ideas and reporting on them. Here's how it can apply to you.

You are, let's say, a stay-at-home homemaker with a home economics degree. Your major may have been family relations, child development, or whatever. But now you are married, living in a tract area of new homes, and interested in observing how various families have solved some specific problem, such as expanding storage areas. By keeping your eyes open, you learn that one family has built a ventilated floor-to-ceiling closet into one corner of the porch to make a storage place for rain-gear. You find a kitchen-minded homemaker who has rebuilt and rearranged her cupboard space. You observe that one neighbor stores nested suitcases permanently in the trunk of the car. You see what appears to be a record cabinet on one wall of the living room, then discover that it contains not records, but Sunday-best china and glassware.

This searching out becomes a hobby with you. Having put together a dozen or more such ideas, you approach (by letter) the editor of a home-making publication. The editor regrets — and perhaps sincerely so — that he sees no way to use an article of this length and scope. He is, however, interested in having you get a photograph of that porch-closet for rain-gear.

Next you turn to your list of trade publications and little magazines (see marginal notes). You

### *When You Write An Article for a Magazine*

Try this system: Narrow down your thinking to a topic sentence. Make that thought apparent in your first paragraph, then go on to expand, explain, and interpret that basic thought. Every magazine article is, of course, an experiment, but in almost every instance this is a good course to consider.

**QUESTION BOX**

**Q.** Do I need a literary agent to market my how-to-do-it articles?

**A.** No. A good agent is a definite help in marketing books, fiction, and articles of general appeal, but is not necessary for how-to-do-it material.

**Q.** What shall I do if an editor asks me to make changes in my copy?

**A.** Make them cheerfully. Remember, every editor knows her own magazine's policies and aims. You, an outsider, cannot possibly know these things.

**Q.** What shall I do if an editor changes my copy?

**A.** Nothing. That's her privilege.

**Q.** If I do not hear from an editor within a month, shall I write her?

**A.** No. Be patient a little longer. She may be on a trip, or your article may be routed to other editors for consideration. Most editors are quite prompt about returning unsuitable articles.

send the cupboard idea to one that has to do with building materials. You send the suitcase idea to a trade magazine devoted to travel or touring. And so on, until you have put most of your material into motion. You do it all in a spirit of passing along ideas, knowing full well that the monetary rewards will probably be slight indeed. But you have enjoyed following through on your project.

There is another valid reason for making contact with editors, whether immediate sales are made or not. Very often an editor needs an "editorial errand" executed in your locality, and, having observed the quality of your work and the personality of your letters, he may give you the assignment.

The thing is, if you want to write you will write. And everything that you do write, whether it is published or isn't, gives you fresh insight into the world around you.

***Suggestions for Students***

Are you a student, hoping eventually to find a place on the editorial staff of a magazine? Then you, too, must specialize in ways such as the following:

During your years in school become well-grounded in your home economics specialty. Learn all you can about writing. Practice doing recipes, directions, and other forms of expository writing. Go over everything you write, editing and revamping your copy until it is crystal clear. Take up photography as a hobby and experiment with it. Learn to use a typewriter. Develop an awareness of what goes on around you. Think creatively.

One young home economist being interviewed for a job in the foods department of a national magazine remarked that she had wondered how

a certain photographic effect had been achieved in one of the magazine pages. This told the editor that here was a girl who had awareness. Eventually in the course of conversation, the applicant mentioned that at one time she had photographed pieces of colored cloth to see how each color would appear in a black-and-white photograph. By this time the editor sensed that the girl had a creative mind.

Yes, the young home economist got the job and has worked happily ever after.

Let us hope, then, that a number of you reading this will one day be considered "editorial timber" by a homemaking editor. Let us hope, too, that some of you who are now homemakers may realize your ambition of seeing your writing published.

If and when such hopes materialize, you must consider another fact. If you are to be on the staff of a publication, you must learn to work with others. If you are an outside contributor, you must accept the fact that what you write will probably be rewritten. Some of your most precious words may be weeded out. You may be disappointed in the way your copy is cut, but you must still cooperate.

Keep in mind, always, that every present-day magazine is an example of what might be termed "distilled journalism." In a foods department, for example, the foods editor knows several weeks ahead of publication date just how many columns of space she will have at her disposal. Months ahead, she knows what subjects she wants to feature. She sets one or more of the staff home economists to work, creating, testing, and retesting the recipes to be used. Others go "prop" hunting for the photographs. Everyone in the department adds ideas. Everyone taste-tests the recipes. Eventually the material is put together, only to be checked and edited again by the copy-editors. No

#### SLANTS AND CYCLES

Every magazine has its special slant. Try to figure out what it is for each publication that interests you. At the same time remember that editorial material seems to run in cycles. For a time, copy may be written in almost smarty fashion, then swing back to simplicity. For a time a magazine may use only staff-written material, then all of a sudden encourage outside contributions. Don't be too concerned about cycles — they'll change.

#### PREPARING THAT MANUSCRIPT

1. Use good grade typing paper of standard size — 8½" x 11".
2. Put your name and address in the upper left-hand corner of first page.
3. In opposite corner state approximate number of words.
4. Put title and sub-title in middle of first page, about 4 inches from top of page. Then proceed.
5. Double-space between the line.
6. Number the pages.
7. Keep a carbon. Keep a record of where manuscript was sent, and when; also a record of payment when it is sold.
8. Save that carbon until article has appeared in print.

**MAILING A  
MANUSCRIPT**

If manuscript is six pages or less, fold it in thirds and send it first class in a long business envelope.

Enclose stamps for possible return. Better yet, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

If manuscript runs six to ten pages, fold it once and use a 7" x 9" heavy manuscript envelope.

If manuscript is more than ten pages, or if there are photos, send it flat in a 9" x 12" envelope, with cardboard for protection.

one person on a magazine can be all-important. All must synchronize their ideas with those of others.

No book can tell you what to write, or prophesy whether or not what you write will be published. What this book wishes to emphasize is this:

Develop awareness of magazines — not only of the ones you see most frequently, but of smaller publications as well. Realize that while all home-appeal magazines are edited by a staff of specialists, most editors' doors and minds are open to really new, interesting, and practical ideas. Learn to think creatively — particularly in developing your own specialities. Be willing to merge your thinking with that of others. Learn to write clearly. Don't get discouraged. If you do these, your dream of working on or for a magazine may eventually become a reality.

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**THE HIGH COST OF COMMUNICATIONS**

It is well for each of us to give thought to the economics of home economics; to ponder the staggering cost of furthering home economics education and home economics communications. It does us good to face up to what it costs to maintain our departments; to figure, even roughly, what it means in dollars and cents to bring out and distribute a leaflet or to put out an information release; to make a typographical change in a piece of copy after the presses are set to go.

Such figuring reminds us that when we produce photographs or sets of words that are not usable, or that are lost on the homemaker or student, we have wasted a great deal of someone's money. We have not lived up to the economics side of our profession. G.A.C.