

Understanding Rejection Slips

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You think you've nailed it.

You watch for the postman day after day, and finally he arrives with the SASE envelope you so lovingly sealed weeks before. Your heart pounding, you run to the mailbox (in your towel) and snatch it out of his hands. It feels awfully light, but you ignore that minor detail.

You dash back into the house and slam the door behind you. Letting the towel slip to the floor, somewhere between the foyer and living room, you now stand next to the kitchen counter.

Taking a deep breath, you pry it open. Then you read: Dear author, "Thank you for your submission. However this piece is not for us..."

Your breath catches in your throat. You feel your spirit being sucked from your very being. Reaching for your towel, you curse angrily. What does this person know anyway? He doesn't know me! But as your anger subsides and you realize that there's a reason this person is in the position he's in, you ultimately begin to do the worst thing possible: you begin to question your worth as a writer.

Why do you put yourself through this torture? I'll tell you why...because rejection slips go with the territory. For a writer, rejection slips are simply a rite of passage--and by understanding what they are and what they aren't, you may not only ease some of the pain, you'll grow as a writer.

All writers suffer rejection. Yes, even the greats. An editor from the San Francisco Examiner sent this in a rejection letter to Rudyard Kipling: "I am sorry, Mr. Kipling, but you just do not know how to use the English language." Even e.e. Cummings wasn't immune to rejection. Did you know it was Cummings' mother who first published his poems after a dozen publishers rejected them? Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* was rejected at least six times before she published it herself. If these acclaimed authors faced rejection, why wouldn't you or I?

Rejections aren't personal. Publishing is a business, not an art. If the agent or editor thinks he can sell your idea or manuscript, he'll buy it. Perhaps your piece wasn't for that editor, that particular day. Maybe he had a similar piece in queue. In fact, there are many trivial factors that determine whether or not a publisher decides to buy your book. Most times it doesn't have anything to do with the

quality of your manuscript. So don't take it personally.

Value criticism. If an agent/editor scribbles a note on your rejection letter, pay attention! More often than not, writers are simply sent a form letter, left to wonder why a piece was rejected. If he scribbles some advice, don't discount it just yet--there may be some merit to it. For instance, if you repeatedly get rejections on a certain piece, or a comment is made by more than one editor, you will want to consider the possibility that maybe it's not sharp enough...yet. Conversely, do not make changes you do not feel are right. Talk to someone who has read your work, and find out what they think about the suggestion.

Rejections should be seen as a sign of accomplishment. Rejections are a sign that you're working hard. Be proud that you actually wrote something, polished it, researched your markets, and mailed it out. That, in itself, is an accomplishment. Most people will go to their graves with the unrealized intention of getting this far!

Don't let rejection slips slow you down. You're chasing your dream--and if you want it badly enough, you won't quit. You'll keep chasing it until you catch it.

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