

Communicating with Editors: The Art of the Nudge

By Elena Petricone

Developing editor relationships can intimidate the toughest writers. After all, editors are the gatekeepers of the traditional publishing route. When editors become unresponsive, make a mistake, or poof away, “nudging” the editor can help writers achieve the outcome they want.

A “nudge” is a friendly, respectful, and firm request for action. I am a champion “nudger” on behalf of client authors at emerson consulting group, inc.

Below are some guidelines for harnessing the power of “the nudge” when communicating with non-fiction editors.* The tips below address nudging editors after they have shown an initial interest in your non-fiction pitch or article. For a how-to on getting your non-fiction articles pitched and published, consult Ken Lizotte’s book, *The Expert’s Edge*.

Nudging 101

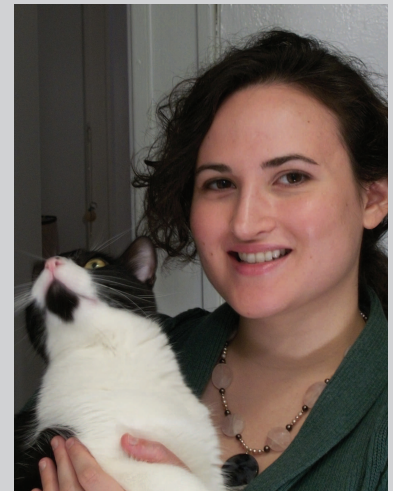
The most important point to keep in mind as you craft and send a nudge is to **stay calm**. Editors are people too, and (most) are sincerely not out to ruin your mental health. Even if you think an editor is being unfair or unreasonable, don’t lose your cool. Sending email or recording voicemail

in the heat of a strong emotion is never a good idea, and certainly not when your published work depends on it.

As you compose your nudge, keep things, as they say, “friendly but formal.” Editors have the luxury of being casual if they choose to (I nearly fell off my chair the first time an editor broke out a “lol” in a reply) but you should save chatspeak for friendlier correspondences.

Keep your nudge short and to the point. A proper and effective nudge adheres to the following structure:

1. **Greet the editor** (“Hello [first name]”)
2. **Remind the editor (concisely) who the heck you are and why the editor should care** (“This is Xauthor. You recently accepted my article ‘Zombies and Kittens: Most Sinister and Visually Striking Accomplices’”)
3. **Make your request clear** (“I was wondering if you could mail me a few print copies. Here’s my mailing address. Let me know if you need anything else”)
4. **Wrap it up** (“Thanks again for your interest, Xauthor”)



Elena Petricone works as a Publishing Associate at emerson consulting group, inc. in Concord, Massachusetts as well as a graduate student earning her MFA in Creative Writing at Lesley University. She can be reached at elena@thoughtleading.com.

That’s all there is to it. Think about how many messages an editor receives on a daily basis. He or she doesn’t have time to read long messages with tangents, plot twists, your life story, etc.

The Basic Nudge

The simplest nudge (but often the most effective) is to resend your original email. Suppose you submitted a few article ideas to a publication. You took great care composing your pitch, taking the time to consider the diction, syntax and tone of each sentence. And...no response. You wait some more. Nothing.

For more mainstream and competitive publications, you will likely find a general response time frame in their submission guidelines. Typically, however, if an editor has not

responded to your email within two to three weeks, it's nudge time.

Don't worry about composing a whole new message. Instead, retrieve the email that you've already sent and send it again. That's right: just send the exact same email again. This nudge has proved to be shockingly effective. I can't tell you how many times I've resent a pitch and received a prompt, interested response.

Nudging will not spur the editor to blacklist you and all your future work. The worst he or she can do is send you back a message saying "Received your pitches; sorry, these aren't a fit for our publication." And that will at least give you closure.

Nudge within respectful reason. If you've pitched your article ideas and nudged the same publication twice within a reasonable amount of time without any response, assume the editor is not interested. Don't abandon hope; once you've developed a new list of ideas, try again.

Following Up

Say an editor has accepted your article. And then... poof. Issues are rolled out and your article is nowhere to be found.

Usually an editor will give you a rough idea when he or she plans to use your article. Things change though, and it's not atypical for an article to be bumped to a later release. Whether the editor has scheduled a publication date for your article or not, however, you are entitled to follow up. The holdup is often a simple explanation; sometimes editors just forget or lose documents. If you don't nudge, you'll never know.

What if your article has been printed in a publication that's not available at newsstands or book stores? While some publications take exception, usually editors have no problem sending out a few copies to their contributors. This action, as you can imagine, is probably not a high priority, and you may have to nudge once or twice to prompt someone to stick copies in the mail. You should not be expected to subscribe in order to obtain a copy of your contribution. Furthermore, you are not "bothering" anybody or making an unreasonable demand by asking for copies.

Corrective Nudges

If you notice that your online or printed article contains a critical error in the byline, biography, or the content of the article itself, nudge. You have the right to request relevant corrections. Moreover, no respectable publication wants to earn a reputation for circulating false or misleading information. Mistakes are usually just that, mistakes. The editor (especially an editor of an online publication) is not always the same person who physically posts and publishes the article, and sometimes things just get overlooked. An advantage of online publishing is the ability for web runners to fix mistakes and update the original release. Print publications, obviously, have to wait for a future issue to acknowledge errors.

Handling Rejection After a Nudge

Rejections happen. Editors have the burden of choosing work that they believe will make their publication appealing to both their readers and their advertisers. It's not personal.

Keep two things in mind: First, just because your article isn't a fit for one publication doesn't mean that it won't work well in another. Don't rewrite your entire article because one editor rejected your idea. When you pitch an article idea, you're best off sending it to at least ten publications. That way, you not only increase your chances of a go-ahead, but you're also less likely to put needless pressure on yourself. If you pitch to several publications and find yourself receiving the same reason for rejection, however, then it might be time to reevaluate your work and make some changes.

Second, some editors will not reveal the basis for rejection in an initial reply. If an editor rejects you without a reason, nudge and ask why. Most of the time, you will receive a polite explanation. Rejection can be difficult to hear, but understanding why you were rejected can provide insight into what and how to query that publication in the future.

Nudge Forward

You know resiliency is critical when negotiating the realities of the writing life. Communicating with editors is part of the process. Writing and sending nudges is an easy and effective way to advocate for yourself and ensure that your work makes it to publication.

*These guidelines could apply to fiction editors as well, but I don't have enough experience to speak to it.