

Well, this one can be complicated. Each publisher has different requirements for play and musical submission. Some are agented, (which means that only if you have an agent can you be placed with that particular publisher). Some only publish from certain markets, (which means if you have not had a New York City production you can pretty well count on not being read, let alone accepted, by some publishers (especially in the Musical market). Some accept unsolicited manuscripts! (not many).

If your play has not been produced -- do not send it to anyone but an agent or directly to a producer. (Those are entirely different strategies than submitting to publishers.)

For open submissions policies, there are usually 3-steps you have to go through. Never send anything unsolicited! Ever! Nyet! Ka-put!!! Even if they say they accept unsolicited manuscripts. It will sit forever until they reader gets around to it. Believe me, they have stacks and stacks of material to wade through.

First, is the research.

Check online for their submissions policies, types of scripts accepted, and times of the year that submissions are accepted. You might also stroll through their catalog to see what titles they have and what titles they do not have, paying particular attention to titles that are NOT in the catalog. Notice what audiences their plays cater to, which performing groups seem to be targeted by the Publisher. You may have the best adaptation of Little Women ever!!! But if a publisher already has one or two versions (play, musical, short, full-length, small-cast, large-cast) you might want to consider not submitting to that publisher, unless your adaptation can be easily distinguishable from their current options and made to stand apart from all others.

Second, is the QUERY LETTER.

This is more than just a letter of introduction (in which you tell them about yourself in a few words as possible), you should also include a more formal BIO or VITAE SHEET. Your query should include a cast list (with description of each character), a list of previous productions, letters of recommendation from producers, any reviews, a good synopsis (with song placement, if a musical) that describes the uniqueness of your particular version (See "Writing a synopsis", below), and a sample 3-8 pages of a scene for dialog purposes (including a song lyric, if a musical). If a musical you may be asked to submit either a sample mp3 AND a sample page of sheet music and/or a lyric sheet. There may be other requirements, so check with each publisher.

Third, is the FULL SUBMISSION.

This will be an entire script and score with possible CD or download of mp3s. There may be other requirements, so check with each publisher.

As to formatting your document.

Each publisher has its own way to format for print purposes. Do not worry terribly about the format of your submission, as long as it is clean and readable and LOOKS professional. White space on the page is preferred. (Wide borders) You can use the Samuel French format with character names centered (**ALL-CAPPED, BOLDED**), stage directions tabbed close to center and possibly parenthesized (and *italicized*), with dialog flush left. You can also submit in the format of all character names (**ALL-CAPPED and BOLDED**) and dialog in paragraph format, flush left, with stage directions indented and *italicized*. If a musical, you should indent your lyrics to a different setting than the stage directions, which could be italicized.

Ease of the read is what a publisher wants out of your formatting. You must also know that playreaders, acquisitions editors, read fast. If you know your play isn't ready -- don't submit. I have too often read the first 4-8 pages of some full scripts and just placed them in the 'NO' pile. Most publishers can tell when a play is not right for them within those few pages. Sometimes it is not about the quality of the play. Your play may be great, but not right for their market, or what the publisher is looking for at that particular moment, sometimes because of its similarity to other material already in the catalog. (Do your research)

Don't be disheartened. Even though you may not get all sorts of notes from a publisher, they still may include something in their rejection letter. Read it carefully. Do not contact them to ask what was wrong with your play. Another 'NO'. It is NOT however, time to throw your play into the round recycler or stuff it through the shredder! Do not react emotionally. I know that one of your children has just been pronounced not bright enough to be promoted, but the time has come for further education!

Get a table reading together, with colleagues, if you can -- and with friends, if you must. Rework the play after the first read, then take suggestions from the readers (and any listeners you invited), especially if you had some from the Publisher, and make improvements. Then do another table read. Query the cast to see if you have met the hurdles set for you by those rejection notes.

Get another production -- even if it is by a small company, or is only a staged reading -- all productions are valuable. It doesn't matter if the producer is amateur or professional or educational -- it is a production. All playwrights should be interested in is getting the play up and on its feet. You can't do that without involving actors and a director.

WRITING A DYNAMITE SYNOPSIS, TEASER, LOG-LINE.

Avoid self-praise. Let the reviews you send do that for you. Tell about the story, who the characters are, what their struggle is, why producers might be interested in this title. You might even tell them how it all works out. Create mystery and excitement without hyperbole. Give a sense of the style in which you write or the style of performance that you feel is best suited to your script. Give them help to see it on the stage of their imaginations. Get them interested in reading your script! Focus on what you think your script can do in their marketing programs. How does your title fill a niche in their market? What audience? Which producer? Does it fit with other pieces in their catalog with similar marketing goals and strategies?

Above all -- keep promoting yourself! Getting your play into the hands of producers may help your chances at getting published. Find its audience! Find its market! Promote! Promote! Promote!

Don't be mad at the Publishers, they don't always get it right, but they do know their market. They read for that market. They are focused on 'who would produce this play' while they are reading it. That phrase plays over and over in their minds while the words slip by on the page.

So, Break A Leg!

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