

# MEMPHIS MAGAZINE

## Writer Submission Guidelines

### January 2008

#### How to get started writing for us.

Before you start thinking about writing an article for *Memphis*, make sure you are familiar with the magazine. This is critical. There is no other way you can get a feel for what we're trying to do, or for how your own article proposal might fit in.

Study recent issues of the magazine. Archived issues are available online, and bound issues are also available at the main branch of the Memphis/Shelby County Public Library and Information Center, which also keeps an up-to-date index of articles we have published. This is useful if you think we may have already covered a particular subject.

We prefer written queries rather than complete manuscript submissions (and no phone calls, please). Such queries should be brief (one page) and include an outline of how you propose to tackle your subject. Send along writing samples to give us some idea of your qualifications. If possible, enclose a resume with your query to give us some idea of your background and related experience.

Bear in mind that a good query will convince us of two things: 1) The story idea is a good one, and 2) You are qualified to write it.

We receive a tremendous amount of mail, so please allow six weeks for a response. Our staff is small, our days are often hectic, and we usually have to spend more time worrying about the present than planning the future.

#### What kind of articles do we like?

We're open-minded. As long as the article idea is interesting, and is in some way relevant to Memphis (a crucial requirement), we'll give your idea real consideration.

We usually don't like- and won't run- puff pieces designed to promote or establish the reputation of a particular individual or organization. Despite our title, we are not a Chamber of Commerce publication, and we are not interested in "Isn't that great for Memphis!" articles. That doesn't mean we are reluctant to run positive, upbeat stories; it just means they must have merit.

We're also not interested in stories that have already run in *The Memphis Flyer*, the daily news, or (with some exceptions) appeared on the evening news.

We're not interested in dining reviews because we already have regular columnists doing that, and we're not usually interested in doing book or movie reviews, because those are routinely handled by *The Memphis Flyer*.

We don't want stories about people or institutions written by authors who are personally involved with those people or institutions. We don't want materials prepared by public-relations agencies and free-lancers paid to promote a company. We insist that all our editorial content be objective and unbiased, the product of independent, impartial research.

So what are we interested in? Just about everything else: politics, business, sports, art, music, drama, nightlife, fashion, education, medicine, crime, history, and so on. We look at national issues and see how they relate to Memphis (poverty, gay rights, urban sprawl, crime). We do profiles of prominent Memphians and those you used to be, and major investigative pieces (animal rights, medicine malpractice, unsolved murders). We do regular fashion and home design features, and lots of how-to features (finance, health and beauty,

interior design), and travel guides. We look back at the city's colorful past (the yellow fever epidemic, Machine Gun Kelly, Elvis).

We generally advise first time *Memphis* writers to choose topics that are as specific as possible. Avoid suggestions that are too broad or too general- or too common. Don't tell us you'd like to write about Elvis or Beale Street; it's been done.

And unless you are an established writer, don't be too ambitious. Pick a subject that interests you, yet is not so complex or difficult that you won't be able to come to grips with it. The best way to "break in" is with a "City Seen" story- the section of 200-500 word features on people, places, and events in Memphis. And avoid big name personalities. It's unlikely, for example, that we would send a first time writer out to do a profile on the mayor.

## **What makes a good *Memphis* article?**

A magazine article is quite different from a newspaper story. Because of this, good newspaper writers are not always good magazine writers (and vice versa). The two jobs require different skills.

First-rate magazine journalists are usually hybrids. They're able to combine the reportorial talents of a newsperson with the literary abilities of a novelist. In writing for a magazine like *Memphis*, it's not enough just to get your facts straight; they must be communicated to the reader in a lively, coherent fashion.

Magazine articles, unlike most of those that appear in newspapers, have distinct parts. Each has a definite beginning, middle, and end. Most start with well-crafted, descriptive leads that depict a particular scene or tell a particular anecdote. In the magazine business, we call these "hooks." That word describes what a good introduction does: It draws the reader into the story.

Magazine stories also have well-defined conclusions. They usually contain summaries, evaluation, or even recommendations. Such endings are designed to pull an entire piece together, to give the readers a sense that they have come away from a story knowing more about the subject than when they started.

One final point. *Memphis* comes out only once a month, and our lead time is about six weeks. Be sure your story won't be dated by the time it appears in print. And unlike newspapers, magazines have a long "shelf life." They can sit on coffee tables for months. A good story should have a long-term perspective that makes it just as readable several months from now as it is today.

## **Preparing the manuscript.**

We begin working on an issue about six weeks before publication. In other words, a manuscript must be in our hands no later than April 15<sup>th</sup> to be considered for the June issue.

When submitting a manuscript, be sure to include your name, address, and phone number on the first page. Also include a word count on the first page.

If you are mailing a manuscript, use regular 8 1/2 x 11 white paper, typed on one side only and double-spaced. It's a good idea to put your name on the top of every page. Don't use onion skin or erasable papers; they smear too easily. And do not fax us a story unless you've already discussed that with the editors; we receive so many faxes that pages tend to get lost.

Electronic submissions are preferred.

Addresses and phone numbers for all sources should be provided, in case we have to verify or correct anything. If your manuscript includes interviews or quotes from particular

individuals, a list of those persons should be attached.

The length of the articles published varies considerably, from less than 200 words to more than 7,000. Check first with the editor who assigned you the story before writing anything. Never expect us to just “make room” for it.

## **What about photography and art?**

All illustrative work for *Memphis* is done on assignment, and these are usually made by the art director and his staff after a manuscript has been accepted for publication. Do not submit photographs with your manuscript unless specifically requested by the editor.

A photographer or artist interested in working with *Memphis* should contact the art director. Don't send your portfolio or samples of your work without first talking to him.

## **Okay, what about money?**

All unsolicited manuscripts are accepted “on speculation.” That means we are under no obligation to publish, or pay for your manuscript. If we decide it is not suitable for publication, we will try to return your manuscript as soon as that decision has been made. Please enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope for that purpose. We will assume any materials submitted without a SASE are not to be returned.

Should your manuscript be accepted for publication, you will be paid at the rate of 10 cents per word, payable with 30 days of publication. That is our standard rate for first-time writers.

Payment for regular contributors varies, depending on the length of the article, the amount of work required, and the amount of editing the manuscript needs. All payments will be confirmed in a letter at the time of the assignment, which usually gives a specific deadline and explains provisions for a “kill fee” in the rare event a manuscript is not used.

We generally buy First North American Serial Rights to articles that we publish, with the understanding that the article will also be reproduced on our website. The means that the author is then free to sell the story to another publication after it has appeared in *Memphis*.

## **Some final guidelines...**

We are often asked about the “style” of *Memphis*. We have no specific rule on that subject. Every writer's own style is distinctive, so don't try to be something you're not.

After you've begun working on an article, you may encounter all kinds of problems or roadblocks that you didn't anticipate. Please don't hesitate to call your editor should any unexpected difficulties pop up. It's usually a good idea to keep in regular contact with the editor, so we have some idea of your progress.

Unless you have received a specific assignment from our editorial staff, do not suggest to the people you interview that they will appear in *Memphis* magazine. You should introduce yourself to persons you interview as a free-lancer researching an article “for possible use in *Memphis* magazine.” Do not agree to give your subject the final say on any story you are working on, and do not suggest such “approval” will be sought by the editors after you submit your manuscript. And do not accept free lunches, gifts or any other type of “bribe” while you are working on a story for us.

That's all the advice we have for now. Good luck!

## **Our editorial staff:**

Mary Helen Tibbs, Editor (tibbs@memphismagazine.com)  
Marilyn Sadler, Senior Editor (sadler@memphismagazine.com)  
Michael Finger, Senior Editor (finger@memphismagazine.com)  
Frank Murtaugh, Managing Editor (murtaugh@memphismagazine.com)  
Murry Keith, Creative Director (keith@memphismagazine.com)