

Submission Policies & Process

The Wandering Words · For Prospective Authors

These policies apply to open submission opportunities for *The Wandering Words*. Each submission announcement may add its own genre, theme, deadline, or eligibility requirements — where an announcement and this document differ, follow the instructions for that specific window.

Who May Submit

- **Headliner** — Generally invitation-only. Headliner stories are commissioned or requested directly by The Wandering Words.
- **Wayfinder** — Open to emerging and rising published authors during designated submission windows. Wayfinders may also be invited.
- **Inkling** — Selected through The Wandering Words short-story contest. Inkling entries follow separate contest rules and a separate submission process.

Word Count by Slot

Word-count ceilings are firm — each story has to fit the printed format, so please stay at or below the limit for your slot.

- **Headliner** (established or recognizable author) — **up to 4,000 words**
- **Wayfinder** (indie, emerging, or rising author) — **up to 2,500 words**
- **Inkling** (contest-winning author) — **up to 1,000 words**

What We Accept

- Original, previously unpublished short fiction only
- Complete stories with a satisfying beginning, middle, and ending
- Stories that match the genre or theme listed for the current submission window
- Work written by the submitting author — AI-generated stories are not accepted
- No reprints, novel excerpts, or chapters that depend on a larger work to feel complete

Each announcement will state whether simultaneous submissions or multiple entries are allowed for that window. If your story becomes unavailable for publication after submitting, please withdraw it promptly.

What “Clean” Means Here

The Wandering Words is meant to be something a reader can comfortably hand to nearly anyone. Tension, romance, danger, emotional conflict, and serious themes are all welcome. These standards are about how far the page goes, not what the story is allowed to be about:

- No explicit sexual content — romantic and emotional tension are welcome; on-page sexual content is not.
- Language should stay mild — Profanity should not be used.
- Violence should stay restrained — real stakes and danger are welcome; graphic or gratuitous violence is not.

Manuscript Format

- Submit a Microsoft Word (.docx) file — no PDFs or Google Doc links, please.
- Name your file "YourName_StoryTitle_Genre" (for example: *JaneDoe_TheQuietHour_Fantasy*).
- Use 12-point Times New Roman or a similar serif font, double spacing, 1-inch margins, and left alignment.
- Include the story title, your name, final word count, and applicable slot on the first page.
- Number all manuscript pages.

Genre, Theme, and Deadline

Genre, theme, issue, opening date, and deadline are listed in each submission announcement or contest page. Stories that don't match the current request aren't considered or held for a future window — you're welcome to submit them again once a matching opportunity opens. Stories are generally requested at least twelve weeks (or more) before an issue's mailing date, to allow time for review, editing, and print production.

Compensation and Contributor Benefits

Publication is currently unpaid. Selected authors receive:

- Five contributor copies of the issue featuring their story
- A publication credit and byline
- An author biography and links through The Wandering Words
- A QR code on the last page of your story that leads to your author biography
- Promotional support connected to the issue
- Editorial feedback upon request

Rights

You retain copyright to your work. If selected, you'll sign an Author Publishing Agreement granting The Wandering Words the print, promotional, and distribution rights needed to publish your story, including six months of exclusivity beginning on the date of first publication. Full terms are in that agreement, provided before publication — see our *Author Guidelines* for a plain-language walkthrough of how it works.

Review and Response

Response timing is listed for each submission window. Unless stated otherwise, please allow up to eight weeks after the submission deadline before checking in on status. Submitting doesn't guarantee acceptance, and contest submission fees, where applicable, are nonrefundable unless the official contest rules say otherwise.

Editing and Publication

Selected stories may receive copyediting, proofreading, or light editorial suggestions, and you'll have a chance to review any changes before publication. Acceptance may be withdrawn if required revisions, the signed agreement, or requested materials aren't returned by the stated deadline. The final edit will be emailed to author. Selected stories are generally published within twelve months of the agreement being signed; the exact issue and schedule depend on genre rotation and production needs.

How to Submit

- **Headliner** — Submit only when contacted or invited by The Wandering Words, unless a public announcement specifically requests Headliner interest.
- **Wayfinder** — Follow the instructions in the current Wayfinder submission announcement or form.
- **Inkling** — Submit through the official contest form and follow the separate contest rules. Please don't email Inkling entries unless the contest instructions specifically direct you to.

Please don't email unsolicited manuscripts unless an active submission announcement directs you to submit by email.

Questions?

Reach us any time at info@thewanderingwords.com.