

# Guidelines for Writers

British Columbia Magazine is a strongly visual magazine: our main feature stories must parallel a variety of images that tell a story in themselves. Before submitting, please study recent issues to understand the interplay we attempt between photos and text. Do not, however, mistake us for just a "pretty picture" magazine. Alongside high-caliber photography, we publish award-winning feature stories that are informative, entertaining, accurate, useful, educational, witty and/or exciting.

Target your story

We seek out the exotic, the strange, the unknown, and the rare within our province. Rather than bore British Columbians with what they know and often see, we want to give them something fresh, surprising, remote, or hidden under the surface. We will revisit familiar B.C. places and themes, but after more than 50 years of publishing, we need a fresh or startling angle to do so.

We're always looking for offbeat features that still manage to stay within our broad themes. We will tackle controversial issues out of a concern for heritage and the environment, provided the nature of the subject is unchanging enough for the long gaps between our quarterly issues. We are interested in profiles of individuals only if they provide a strong link to exploration, discovery, landscape, or adventure in the province.

# Preferred writing style

No promotional gush, please

British Columbia Magazine aims to entertain and enlighten its readership with realistic profiles of this endlessly fascinating province. Writers should strictly avoid promotional travel-brochure gush, shameless hyperbole, and adjectival excess. ("As the glowing, orange sun set on the misty, western horizon, our minds went over the full events of the day." "Never had I seen mountains so majestic, peaks so lofty. I thrilled at the sight, awe-inspiring in its magnitude.")

Writers we love

We look for writers with a curious and knowing voice, who can see places with fresh eyes and real insight, and who understand the roots of good storytelling: the compelling anecdote, the colourful character, the lively quote, the telling detail. Readers should experience the destination directly through the words and actions of people the writer encounters, not just through the writer's narrative. Our preferred writing style is enthusiastic, thoughtful, often first-person (though third-person can lend a quiet authority to the right subject), usually present tense, sometimes light-hearted, and always reflects a passion for the subject.

#### **Accuracy is Crucial**

Writers must demonstrate a breadth and depth of knowledge about B.C., and support their logic with interviews, thorough research, and first-hand experience. Be precise: readers use our stories to plan their own adventures. Include exact distances between areas; give the specific height of a mountain rather than call it "high"; give proper names rather than say "a mountain", "a lake"; identify flora and fauna species. At the same time, keep your facts on topic and don't shotgun the reader with trivial detail: remember, you're writing a story, not a statistical report.

#### We are not interested in

Poetry; fiction; why-I-love-B.C. testimonials; accounts of family vacations; tales of wild-animal hunting or trapping; glorifications of reckless wilderness adventures, especially those that involve tearing through the landscape with off-road vehicles, jet-boats, and the like. Sorry, but we are not a publication that breaks in fledgling writers; we expect a strong background in professional writing.

# Freelance Queries

We work with freelance writers on every issue, using both assigned feature articles and manuscripts submitted on speculation. We begin to review all proposals on file in January of each year and start assigning stories in March; publication generally occurs in the following year. Most assignments go to writers who have performed well with us previously or have a strong magazine feature or journalistic background. Spec manuscripts and story ideas are considered throughout the year, though it's best to submit before March. We especially welcome text-photo proposals from those rare writers who can provide high-calibre photography with their stories, or who work closely with a top-notch photographer (though we reserve the right to select text or photos separately). In many cases, we will assign a photographer or coordinate a portfolio of stock photography to illustrate articles we select for publication.

We welcome text-photo proposals

#### **How to Query**

- Before submitting anything, read several RECENT issues of the magazine. Search our online article index at www.bcmag.ca to see when we last published a story on your proposed topic.
- When you submit proposals and spec manuscripts, keep in mind that most decisions are made from January to March.
- No phone calls, please. An original, well-composed, one-page proposal that demonstrates your writing style is far more likely to garner an assignment than any idea pitched on the phone to a deadline-harried editor. Queries by e-mail are preferred, with a covering note in the e-mail and the story proposal attached in a separate word document. Short, e-mail queries without attachments are welcome only if well considered and carefully composed: loose ideas dashed off by e-mail make a bad impression.
- Queries by e-mail are best
- Please note: a place is not a story idea. We need a compelling reason to assign an article: a specific angle, news that makes the subject fresh, or a writer's enthusiasm for and familiarity with the topic.

- Queries should include a thorough outline of the proposed article. Show how your subject is timely and appropriate for *British Columbia Magazine*, how it may lend itself to visual presentation.
   Write a proposed lead, a short summary of the content—noting potential interviewees, research sources, highlights, anecdotal information—and a conclusion.
- Send published clips and a short publications bio with your query
  if you are an accomplished feature writer but new to British Columbia
  Magazine. Less experienced writers should send manuscripts on spec.
- Specify availability of photography with your submission. If you expect to provide your own images, or are working with a photographer, include sample images with your query or manuscript. If you know of existing professional photography on your proposed subject, especially if it is an obscure topic or remote location, supply photographer contact info where possible.

Is there existing professional photography?

- If submitting previously published material (very rarely accepted), include when and where the story has appeared.
- If you choose to submit a written query by post, always include a SASE and allow at least two months for a response.
- We receive a large volume of queries and need time to consider each thoughtfully. Bear in mind, too, that *British Columbia Magazine* is a quarterly magazine that publishes just 20 features stories a year, selected from hundreds of proposals.
- Finally, please feel free to send a follow-up e-mail to our editors to enquire about the status of your query. Our inbox is inundated daily with many, many e-mails, and follow-ups to queries are always appreciated.

#### **Feature Stories**

Main feature stories generally run between 1,500 and 2,500 words: our favourites are comprised of a central story with one or two thematically linked 500-word breakout sidebars. We also look for shorter stories of 1,000 to 1,500 words in length that lead to two- to four-page layouts. Service information in a sidebar of 200 to 500 words (detailing how to get there/ what to do/guide-outfitters/maps/websites, phone and e-mail contacts for more info) is required for every travel/destination article. Please study recent issues and emulate the style and substance of our sidebars with your own.

## **Departments**

In every issue of British Columbia Mahgazine:

#### **Day Trip Diary:**

First-person accounts of a single-day adventure, hike, or excursion. 500 words.

#### **Destination:**

First-person small-town getaways. 1,300 words with sidebar.

#### **Due West:**

Front-end department features "quick bites" of British Columbia:

very short newsy stories, humor anecdotes, new parks and travel opportunities, historical discoveries, and other juicy, quirky tidbits. 25 to 300 words. Read the magazine to understand what we look for in this section.

#### **Echoes:**

B.C. history through the eyes of famous, infamous, or little-known British Columbians. 1,300 words.

#### **Outdoor Advisor:**

A service department with practical tips and techniques on subjects relating to outdoor exploration. 600 words.

#### Person & Place:

Q and A on a favourite getaway with a noteworthy British Columbian. 500 words. Typically written in-house, but we will consider submissions.

#### Wild File:

Wildlife profiles presented with a very specific "10 list" structure. Study recent issues to understand what we look for with this section. (Note: Wild Files run infrequently.)

#### Rates

British Columbia Magazine pays 50 cents per word on acceptance of a fully satisfactory feature manuscript. Higher rates for more complex research assignments or those involving extra expenses may be arranged: limits will be set at the time of assignment. Contributors will receive a complimentary copy of the issue in which their work appears, and will receive additional payment on publication for any of their own images selected for use with the story.

# **Usage Rights**

*British Columbia Magazine* buys first worldwide print rights, and may negotiate an additional fee to purchase non-exclusive electronic rights. All inquiries about reprints or subsidiary rights are referred to the writer.

# Fact Checking

Always check and double-check your story information. *British Columbia Magazine* strives to be accurate on all counts, including spelling of names, historical facts, highway numbers, directions, place names, and caption details. With a small editorial staff, we are unable to do extensive verification on stories submitted for our use. We rely on our freelancers to provide carefully researched, accurate copy. Please provide a list of sources with your manuscript (names and daytime phone numbers). Provide titles of books (with author and publisher) from which you have drawn material. Writers may also be asked to provide copies of printed material (brochures, maps, charts) used in their research.

# **Spelling and Style**

We follow *The Globe and Mail Style Book* and *Gage Canadian Dictionary*, with some in-house exceptions. That means using "colour," "flavour," "centre," and so on, but "program" rather than the unwieldy "programme." We spell out numbers under 10, and use all metric measurement, employing imperial only when necessary for clarification, common sense, or emphasis. Individuals, after being introduced by full name, are referred to in subsequent references by surname only, not given name (e.g. "Smith says" not "John says").

#### **Photo Ideas**

We appreciate information on promising photo opportunities or illustration material you may discover in the course of your story research. Let us know about people and places you think are particularly photogenic. Pass along brochures, archival photos, maps, and so on that you think might be useful.

#### **Previews**

Manuscripts are confidential between the writer and editor, and must remain so until publication. Please decline any requests your subjects may make to preview your story; if they persist, gently refer them to the editor. Our lead times are long, and we don't wish to see original ideas scooped by other publications.

### **Deadlines**

Deadlines are a fact of publishing life and should not be violated. If it looks like you're going to be late, please advise the editor well in advance—which is not the day before your piece is due. If, in the course of researching your article, the story doesn't work out the way you thought it would, discuss it with us well before the deadline. We may not want a story that is fundamentally different from the one you agreed to write.

# **Editing**

Fixes and editing are part of the editorial process. We reserve the right to edit and rewrite articles to comply with our style. Author proofs are not generally provided. The title of an article and the explanatory "deck" beneath it are as important in displaying the article as the layout and design. We welcome your suggestions, but this display copy is ultimately an editorial responsibility.

#### **Contact Us**

Thank you for your interest in contributing to *British Columbia Magazine*. We value your ideas and submissions. With your help, we can keep our magazine vital, interesting, and unpredictable. Please address all proposals or spec manuscripts to:

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