

## SUBMISSION DOES NOT MEAN SURRENDER



*Dear Writer, thank you for your submission. We're sorry to say...*  
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I've seriously considered changing my name to 'Writer.' A personalized letter is so much more promising. And for a while I titled every work I wrote, "Your Submission," if only to delay the inevitable for one more intern-produced, low-tonered, crookedly xeroxed line. Sleeping with my head in my mailbox for six months at a stretch demanded nothing less.

I guess I started collecting rejection letters because I couldn't think of any better way to organize a record of those to whom I'd submitted. When they filled the first binder, I thought it was amusing, in a Wow-this'll-be-great-to-show-off-as-a-lesson-in-perserverence-when-I'm-the-most-famous-author-in-the-world kind of way. When the second reached maximum capacity, I might have begun to doubt exactly what the lesson would turn out to be. Now the third binder is in danger of exploding rain forests worth of phrases like "Doesn't meet our current needs," "Only the opinion of one house," "Others may feel

differently,” and “Would encourage you to submit elsewhere.” And that inspiring, “Sorry, I want to publish books that matter,” one too.

At a school visit recently a kid asked me why I keep “all those restraining orders,” a sad, but perhaps uncannily intuitive slip-of-the-tongue. First I eyeballed him a while to make sure he didn’t know more about me than was legally comfortable. When I determined he was cool, I said I lugged them around hoping to induce a hernia and file for Workman’s Comp. Which got a snort out of the teacher grading a forty-foot stack of papers in the back. Which is worth something.

It’s funny how, for a while, one’s quaint little notions of “write and wrong” demand following the “rules,” or “Rule,” really:

### **ABSOLUTELY NO SIMULTANEOUS SUBMISSIONS!**

And so one duly submits. But soon enough that seldom-heard mathematical voice muses from its long abandoned brainfold: *Hmmm. Six months response time. So...hmm...we could submit this to...let’s see...two places a year. In ten years, we could have twenty readings!*

As a good, decent and patriotic citizen, one tries not to hear this numbercrunching, statgeek voice, but it makes a compelling point in the end. And so I will admit to having started to slip the odd extra submission out, together-like. Just two or three per round. At first. You should know it wasn’t easy. The tension was nearly unbearable in the ensuing months. I had to make sure I never had my back to the door while typing at coffee shops. But when neither me nor my wife and child were whacked by publishing industry assassin interns, I maybe, possibly, increased the simultaneity. A bit. Or so. Let’s just say my head no longer fit in the mailbox and leave it at that.

But fast forward.

One fine day, one fine year or so later, I get a call from a publisher who'd just read a picture book story of mine about life in the refrigerator called, *Cheese Louise!* And he tells me he loves the book. And that he wants to publish it. And that he's "been dreaming his whole life of publishing a book with vegetables in it."

I do not wish to disparage purveyors of sound career advice like: "Do your research. Find out what each publisher is looking for. Target your submissions." But the fact is, I would not now have nine picture books published (going on sixteen); I would not have just launched a teen fantasy series; I would not have an adult literary novel and collection of short fictions heading to press, if my target wasn't—What's the word? Oh, yes: *everybody*. Thus, the lesson I have learned: An editor out there is dreaming of you—it's up to you to find him. Then it's up to you to find the next one.

My first reading of *Cheese Louise* (my first reading of anything I'd ever written) was for one little girl, dragged over to me by an embarrassed Borders' employee. She picked her nose the whole time I read (the girl not the employee).

It was beautiful.

*David Michael Slater teaches middle school in Portland, Oregon, where he lives with his wife and son. David writes for children, teens, and adults. He is the author of many beloved picture books, including CHEESE LOUISE!; JACQUES & SPOCK (a Children's Book-of-the-Month Club Alternative Selection); and FLOUR GIRL (a Mom's Choice Award winner). David's teen series, SACRED BOOKS, launched in Oct., 2008 with THE BOOK OF NONSENSE (an Association of Booksellers for Children's Best Books 2008 finalist and Cybil Award nominee). Forthcoming are seven picture books in 2009, his first adult novel, SELFLESS (April, '09), and a collection of short literary fiction. More information about the author and his work can be found at [www.davidmichaelslater.com](http://www.davidmichaelslater.com). Feel free to copy and share this article.*