Before You Start

The “Friend” buys hundreds of short stories every year, and with a very distinctive, individual approach to both fiction and features, it is essential that before you start . . .

READ THE MAGAZINE AND STUDY THE MARKET.

1. “Friend” readers range in age from about thirty to well over eighty. They like being entertained — and dislike being depressed. They like realistic material, but not so realistic — with sex, violence, drugs, drink, etc — that they are frightened or saddened.

2. They still believe in the sanctity of marriage and the importance of the family.

3. Our readers like people — ordinary people, with problems they can sympathise with, and in situations they can relate to. They’re optimistic — they like to see something good coming out of a situation, or the redeeming side of a character.

4. They’re practical women — and men — with ordinary interests and hobbies. They’re always willing to give a neighbour a helping hand and enjoy being with a group of friends.

5. Yes — they are traditionalist. And proud of it! So they like to see their values reflected in their “Friend”. Many say that’s exactly how they regard the magazine — as a friend.

So please, read “The People’s Friend” for several weeks. Then, try to work out how the authors have achieved what we want.

But don’t just write a carbon copy of something already published. Try to be original.

Short Stories

OUR stories are 1200 to 3000 words long, although stories of up to 4000 words are welcome for our specials.

Deeper, more emotional, stories tend to need more space than lighter ones.

Our readers like people — ordinary people, with problems they can sympathise with, and in situations they can relate to. They’re optimistic — they like to see something good coming out of a situation, or the redeeming side of a character.

We rarely use stories from the viewpoint of animals or inanimate objects, and anything with a supernatural theme gets the thumbs down from our very responsive readers.

In the author’s byline we frequently describe our stories as tender . . . touching . . . moving . . . amusing . . . charming . . . All words with positive feelings behind them.

Your raw material is people. Our readers want to identify with your characters, believe in them, their problems and the situations. If they can’t get close to a character, or that character does or says something unconvincing, they’ll lose interest. Your job is to keep the reader reading.

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**Serials**

WE strongly recommend that you try writing short stories successfully for us before you attempt a serial.

But once you’re ready to make the leap, serials are normally worked on from the early stages by the author and at least one member of staff. The storyline is carefully worked out by phone, letter, or by a face-to-face conference. Only when agreement is reached does the story proceed.

All our serials have a strong emotional situation as their central theme, usually family based.

There can be other loosely-connected storylines involving family members, relatives, friends... So it’s quite in order to change viewpoints.

We avoid subjects that are controversial, or which would be beyond the average reader’s comprehension. We don’t want to teach, or preach, or clamour on bandwagons. We don’t want unusual, outrageous or offensive characters . . .

This doesn’t mean that our characters are bland. Far from it. They must appeal to the reader’s imagination and stir their emotions.

Your story can be set in the present day or it can be historical — without going too far back into the dim and distant past!

Writing a serial isn’t like writing a novel. You have to enthral the reader in such a way that she — or he — is looking forward eagerly to next week’s instalment. You don’t have the luxury of writing long, beautifully crafted narrative.

Serials run to eight or ten instalments on average, though we will use shorter stories from time to time. The opening instalment is around **6000 words**, and in it you should aim to set the scene, introduce your characters and explain their problems. Your opening page must catch and hold the reader’s interest right away. Some problem, some crisis, should be coming to a head, some endeavour, some venture about to be undertaken . . .

**Serials are strongly emotional**

normally shorter, around **5000 words**. Each instalment is made up of three, four or five chapters, or scenes. (Get the idea of differentiating between a chapter and an instalment.)

Each chapter should deal with a particular aspect, or incident, or scene in the story, moving it forward at a good pace. Although there will naturally be some overlap, each chapter should be more or less complete, ending on a high point to encourage the reader to go on.

Don’t jump around in short, quick, disjointed scenes. Give yourself a chance to develop your characters and their relationships. The readers enjoy a good, sustained read.

Your final chapter to the instalment should have a more powerful curtain, so the reader is impatient to know what will happen in the following week’s magazine.

How your characters react in their different ways to the problems and situations you put them in, is what makes your “Friend” story. Your storyline — plot, if you like — is important, of course, but the reader will remember a good character long after she’s forgotten other details.

Effective use of dialogue will not only build up your characters in the reader’s mind, it can also provide background information and keep the story moving along briskly.

Don’t write long passages explaining what makes your character tick, or what’s gone before. The reader should “sense” their personality through what they say and how they react to challenging situations. Let the characters speak for themselves, so the reader can get involved and identify with them.

Study the popular soaps on TV. See how effectively their writers use dialogue.

We very rarely buy a complete serial in manuscript form. Don’t even try a first instalment on your own! Send us your idea, with perhaps just a few pages of the story, and give us a detailed synopsis of how the story develops . . . and we’ll get back to you.

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**Submitting A Manuscript – 10 Golden Rules**

1. We’re happy to consider unsolicited manuscripts, but once you’ve completed your story, try to read it objectively. Ask yourself — “Is this really a ‘Friend’ story?” And answer honestly, now! If the answer is a definite No, please don’t send it in. But if you feel it’s right for us, by all means let us see it. We’re here to help and advise you.

2. Manuscripts should be typed on one side of the paper only. Use double spacing and KEEP A COPY.

3. You should have a flysheet, showing the title and author’s name (or pen-name), and the word count. And please include your own name and address.

4. Number the pages of your story or serial instalment.

5. Paperclip the pages together and preferably use an A4 envelope so that you don’t have to fold the typescript. Anything you can do to make your work easy to read is appreciated. Please ensure postage is correct.

6. Address your short stories to the Fiction Editor at the address below.

7. Seasonal stories should be submitted fully three months in advance, and marking the season on the envelope will draw it to our attention.

8. Enclose a suitable SAE with the correct postage. Or if you live abroad, send an International Reply Coupon if possible. We will not respond to submissions unless an SAE/IRC/EMAIL address is enclosed.

9. Please don’t swamp us with manuscripts! We often find that a collection of stories all have the same basic flaw. So, if you’ve been enthusiastically writing, pick the best one — or two — to send in to test the water. It’ll save your postage — and we’ll let you know if we want to see more of your work.

10. Be prepared to wait a few weeks for a reply. Our selection process can take some time.