

How to Break the Andy Syndrome

by Sherri Langton

I feel your pain, Miranda Priestly.

Miranda is the perfectionist editor-in-chief of *Runway*, a top fashion magazine in [*The Devil Wears Prada*](#). One morning she sweeps into her New York City office and finds Andy Sachs waiting for her. A college graduate, Andy is applying for a job as Miranda's second assistant.

One look at this naïve, plainly dressed young lady tells Miranda she has no fashion sense. But that's not all. In front of this editing icon, Andy admits she has never read *Runway*.

Amazing how life imitates art. As an editor at the [*Bible Advocate*](#) magazine and [*Now What?*](#) e-zine, I've dealt with many Andys — not job applicants but freelance writers. Without even peeking at our pages, they trot out their manuscripts and watch them crash in the rejection pile. Often the problem isn't poor writing but a poor match. These writers have no clue who we are and what we publish.

Take the man who submitted reprints of his published columns. He fanned out his credentials like a deck of cards, then admitted he hadn't seen our magazine before submitting. Another writer pitched a piece on the conflicts a librarian faces, like annoying customers, e-readers and aching feet.

Seriously? If you thumb through our magazine for sixty seconds, you'll see nothing related to librarians and no columns written by outside authors. The work of these freelancers sat in my inbox for two months when they could have been making money in suitable markets.

Editorial guidelines urge writers to read the magazine before submitting, but many of them don't — or don't know what to look for. Analyzing a magazine isn't hard to do, but it does take time and know-how. Though there are a number of areas to study, these five can get you started:

- Cover. The magazine's "front door" reflects the readership (brides, fishermen, musicians, ministers, etc.) or perhaps the theme of that issue. Does your idea fit these readers?
- Ads. These too reflect the readership. A piece about homeschooling your kids won't fly in a magazine with ads for denture cream. Do you see pages promoting cruises to expensive resorts? If so, your tips for travel on a tight budget will miss the boat.
- Contents page. This can consist of how-to pieces, personal experiences, profiles, interviews, essays, self-help articles — you name it. Do you see the kind of content you like to write? Remember, the more articles in relation to standing columns (written by staff members), the greater the chances of freelancers getting in.
- Article structure. Once you're deep inside the magazine, pick an article that comes closest to the one you want to write, and crack its "code." Is the introduction an anecdote, a quotation or a startling statement? Does the body consist of quotations

from authors and other sources? Is the conclusion another anecdote, a quotation, advice or a strong summary? Once you decipher the article's code, follow it to a T.

- Style. Is the writing conversational, as if you're talking to a friend over coffee? Or more formal, as if you're listening to a lecture? When you study a magazine, think of it as a "voice lesson" in matching the periodical's distinct sound.

Whatever happened to Andy Sachs? She got the job at *Runway*. Through sheer fortitude, she learned about the magazine the hard way — and had the scars to prove it.

You can save yourself that kind of grief. If you want to make money writing for a magazine, get to know it first. The editor will love you for it.

BIO: Sherri Langton is associate editor of the [Bible Advocate](#) magazine and [Now What?](#) e-zine.