

## CHAPTER 8

# FINE-TUNE YOUR ARTICLE WITH MY FOOL-PROOF ACCEPTANCE TEST.

You have an idea for a terrific article and you think you have a magazine that would go wild about it. But perhaps your research turned up very little about the magazine; or perhaps you have tons of information, but you're still not sure of the fit. Is there a way to be absolutely, positively be sure that you're querying the right magazine?

There sure is. Let me introduce you to Meg's Foolproof Acceptance Test. If your idea passes this test, only the editor could know better if it's right for the magazine.

### **How it works.**

Divide a regular sheet of paper into three vertical columns. Of course, instead of a paper and, if you're comfortable with computers, you can use a table in your word processing program, or as I do, a spreadsheet program, to set this up.

Title the left column "Advertiser," the middle column "Message," and the right column "What is the likelihood that people interested in this ad would read my article?" As you work your way through the test, the answers to this questions are either "Great," "Medium," "Slim," or "None." And be honest.

Then take the latest issues of the magazines you want to query and open them randomly to five to ten advertising pages. (Don't peek to pre-select them.) In each column on your sheet of paper or on your computer screen, write down the name of the advertiser(s) in the first column, briefly describe the scene in the ad in the middle column, and, in the right-hand column, whether your article supports the advertisement.

### **How to use it.**

Let me illustrate. Say you're an avid gardener and that you just finished a garden for your new house in the foothills with a wonderful view of the city in the

valley below. Since your lot was on a slope you had to confer with a landscape architect about retaining walls, water runoff and soil composition. You learned about new techniques for designing gardens on hillside properties and being a writer, you decided to share your knowledge in a magazine article.

The first magazine that pops into your mind is *Garden Design*. It seems like an obvious choice, but you do your research and when you come to it's positioning you begin to wonder if this is really the right magazine to query. This is its editorial mission:

"GARDEN DESIGN is the first magazine to treat the garden as a state of mind as well as a place to be. Its mission is to explore the garden with a whole new generation of readers – people whose confident personal style and environmental fervor have led them to rediscover the satisfaction of their own backyards. Along the way, they have learned that every garden path opens up a world of adventure.

GARDEN DESIGN is about culture in every sense – growing, learning, and appreciation. It invites this new generation to celebrate the gardener as an artist and a philosopher, writer and photographer, traveler and collector, horticulturist and, of course, nurturer.

GARDEN DESIGN reveals all the exciting ways we live in outdoor rooms today. It defines a sophisticated yet comfortable garden style that works with nature's rich variety – and at the same time brings the spirit of the garden into our homes.

GARDEN DESIGN's voice is contemporary; it's look, bold and sensuous. Its pages reflects the ideas and issues, passion and just plain fun its readers experience whether they are out in the garden or simply thinking about it."

You're not sure. Words like: "...celebrate the gardener as artist and philosopher..." "Its pages reflect...passion...fun..." are not specific enough for a writer. You just can't make up your mind.

But instead of spending time working on a questionable query, you put your article through Meg's Foolproof Acceptance Test to make sure that you spend your energy on the right effort. Remember, your answers in the right-hand column should be "Great," "Medium," "Slim," or "None."

<b>ADVERTISER</b>	<b>MESSAGE</b>	<b>WHAT IS THE LIKELIHOOD THAT PEOPLE INTERESTED IN THIS AD WOULD READ MY ARTICLE?</b>
Weber	Ad for top-of-the-line, restaurant-grade outdoor gas grill with warming racks and heavy-duty 14,000 BTU side burner. The headline is: "Grilling Should Be a Joy. Not a Test of Your Nerves."	Medium.
Calvin Klein	Eternity – Fragrances For Men and Women.	Read an article about soil? None.
Baccarat	Photo of man and a woman in a seductive pose. The man is holding a beautiful crystal bowl.	None.
Bermuda Tourist Board	Photo of a beach, surf, blue sky and turquoise water. The headline is "Could an Entire Island Be an Aphrodisiac?"	Well, at least they're interested in nature: Medium.
La Cornue, France	The Chateau 147 commercial-kitchen oven comes in fifteen hand-finished porcelain enamel colors and six different types of metal trim. Headline: Acclaimed by French Gourmets Since 1908.	Slim.
Stone Manor Lighting	Garden lights in the shape of flowers. The headline: Jewels for the Garden.	Medium.
Amdega	Elegant greenhouses and conservatories. The headline: Conservatories handmade in England since 1874 from the finest timber and glass.	Medium.
HotSpring Portable Spas	Photo of man and woman enjoying their spa. Headline: Out there, it's bumper-and-bumper, minute-to-minute, nose-to-nose. In here, it's heart-to-heart.	Slim.

If you look at your answers in the right-hand column, they are not very

encouraging. In essence, the magazine's advertisers have turned thumbs down on your article and likely the editor would too. Either don't send a query or reslant your article to fit the magazine.

What about your other choice, *Organic Gardening*? If we put your article through Meg's Acceptance Test using this magazine, this is what we would get:

ADVERTISER	MESSAGE	WHAT IS THE LIKELIHOOD THAT PEOPLE INTERESTED IN THIS AD WOULD READ MY ARTICLE?
Vita-Mix Corporation	Photos of blenders full of vegetables and the headline: Cook, Freeze, Juice in 4 Easy Steps, and Clean Up Is a Snap!	Hmm, likes to make own food/would like making own soil? Probably. Answer: Medium.
ComposTumbler	People using product to make mulch.	A no-brainer! These people <i>like</i> to make their own soil. Great.
DR Chippers	Photo of wood chipper/shredder.	Medium.
Whole Foods Markets	Headline: Good stuff for you and the planet.	Medium.
Stokes Seeds	Ad for flower and vegetable seeds, tools, pots.	Great.
WormWigWam	Ad for worm composting.	Great.
HoffCo	Ad for Li'l Hoe soil tiller.	Great.

Medium, great, medium, medium, great, great, great. If you did have any doubts about *Organic Gardening* being the right magazine for your soil article, they should be gone by now. The advertisers just told you that you're right on. Go ahead and query. I think you'll be pleasantly surprised at the outcome.

Keep in mind, however, that just because an article idea fails the advertising test doesn't mean it's a bad idea. Reslant your article, take it through the test again and if the reslant passes the test, you may soon be sending out a second query.

**NEW STRATEGY NUMBER 8:**

**Give your article Meg's  
Foolproof Acceptance Test.**

In the next chapter you will gather all your information and prepare an all-inclusive query that shows an editor you know what it takes to publish an article.