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What to Do When Your Published Stories Go Missing

April 14, 2021



I finally accomplished my most procrastinated writerly task: my website. After learning how to use WordPress, taking photos, and setting up email forwarding, I was excited to assemble my publication credits. But when I looked for the link to a piece of flash fiction I published in 2016 by *A Long Story, Short*, I couldn't find it. The website was gone.

Everyone always warns that the internet is forever— that things posted online never completely disappear. Well, my story apparently had. I felt as if I'd suffered a loss.

As fellow writers, you probably understand my pain. The submission process can be taxing for any writer.

So what did all of that effort mean now that my story was, well, gone? If I couldn't find a copy to put in my portfolio, I hoped to republish it. I wasn't sure how to go about the process, though, since I'd never been in this situation before. As I navigated recovering my lost story, I learned a lot about the submission process for reprints. If you ever find yourself in my situation, here are my best tips for republishing a piece of work.

Step #1) Try Finding it One More Time.

I'd already searched for my story by going to the magazine's defunct website and Facebook page, but I hadn't done an exhaustive search. When I began my Google search, I started with the title. Then I expanded to title and author, since titles can be extremely common. Finally, in order to do a more thorough search, I searched line by line. This may be tedious, but I learned that a sentence-by-sentence search gives you a greater chance of finding an archived webpage.

If the publication had a Facebook page, you can try searching Facebook. Be sure to look through any posts you may have shared featuring your work as well.

Step #2) Define “Previously Published.”

When I found out the online journal that published my piece no longer existed, my biggest concern was whether or not my piece would still be considered “published.” However, I soon learned that my situation was no different from someone who published in a print-only publication. The print magazine would publish the story, and later on, it would be hard to find without ordering a back issue. Published is published.

If you've posted any piece online, even if you're not intending your work to be read by a wide audience, it qualifies as previously published. Publishing on your own website, or any place where it can be found publicly, counts.

Step #3) Find Publications that Accept Reprints.

In my publishing experience, I'd gotten used to seeing the phrase “previously unpublished” on the submission requirements page. Many journals and magazines want to be the first to publish any piece of work. But, it turns out, some publications do accept reprints. Here are a few things to keep in mind when doing your research:

- Make sure you have the rights to the piece you want to republish. Many literary magazines state that rights revert back to the author upon publication, but others state that rights revert to the author after a specified length of time, such as 90 days.
- Are you a non-fiction writer? Chances are you can get your op-ed or personal essay reprinted, but check in with the editor you previously worked with to be sure.
- If you work as a freelance writer, you may have created content for clients that doesn't bear your byline. In this case, you're creating content that your client controls. You can't publish this content elsewhere.

Step #4) Submit!

Some of my favorite resources I've used to find homes for my work are [Submittable](#), [Writer's Market](#), and [Duotrope](#). To find publications that accept reprints, I prefer the search filters that Duotrope offers. You can also do a quick Google search for “reprinting” and the type of work you want to publish.

In your cover letter, be sure to mention where your piece was previously published and when. If your piece has gone missing, like mine, then feel free to explain the situation.

Can't get anyone to bite? No one says you can't self-publish. The website I just started has a blog, so I could always publish my short story there. [Medium](#) also hosts publications that publish short stories.

Step #5) Save a copy of your publications to your computer or phone.

Once your work is published, be sure to save a copy— I wish I'd taken this step! Saving a specific webpage as a PDF is a surprisingly easy way to preserve your work. On an iPhone, click the arrow at the bottom to send. Next to the website name, you'll see a clickable options button, and you can select PDF from the menu. Send yourself the PDF in an email. You can also do this on a desktop. At the very least, taking a screenshot from a computer will provide you with a copy.

Step #6) Promote it!

Regardless of where you republish your piece, promote it on your website and social channels once it's up. You've worked hard, Scribbler, and it's time to let the world know!

Written by [Rebecca Schier-Akamelu](#)

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