

A BIT ON THE SIDE

Markets and opportunities for small fillers are everywhere. You just need to know where to look and what to write, says **Abby Williams**

While you're waiting for that well-crafted pitch to be acknowledged, use your time to dash off some fillers. There's a large, often financially lucrative market for them. A regular stream of published fillers can net you several hundred pounds a year – a great boost to the morale if your rejection pile of features is climbing faster than your acceptance one.

Don't be fooled into thinking a filler requires less effort and research though. Market research is especially important – a letters page in one magazine might contain only letters referring to previous articles. In another, the page may focus more on amusing anecdotes and readers' experiences. Writing needs to be tight and well-targeted. Prune your letter, and prune again, until it's punchy and fits the word count and style of others printed in the magazine.

Sourcing markets

- Libraries offer free access to monthly emagazines if you have a valid library card number. Create an account and read full digital images of the magazine on a computer or mobile device. Access around one hundred popular titles, many with a letters page.
- The free supermarket magazines (Asda, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Co-op) publish letters, recipes, and your cooking dilemmas so don't forget to pick one up at the till.
- Connect with magazines on Facebook and you may be approached directly by them to share your opinion, contribute to a discussion or be a case study.
- Buy a selection of Saturday tabloids and broadsheets. There are several filler opportunities if you study them well.
- Find subscription deals on the internet.
- Study the stack of magazines at the doctor's or dentist's. They may be a bit thumbed and a few months old but it gives you the chance to find ones that appeal.
- For a couple of pounds you can buy a month's worth of a weekly women's interest magazine, often just as likely to take suitable contributions from men. Four issues will give you an insight into who the magazine targets and the kind of material they publish.
- Hairdressers and barbers have the latest issues of magazines. Take a pen and pad with you, read through some articles and jot down your opinions to write up a letter later – don't forget the details of where to send it.

Letters are not the only fruit

The filler market is diverse and fluid – try a spot of flash fiction, compile a puzzle or a 4x4 crossword, recall an amusing anecdote, send up your beauty dilemma or a fashion disaster. Have you got an original joke you are itching to tell or a delicious recipe you want to share?

Write a short filler about your favourite place, why you like it and attach a selfie. Your health story (from migraines to more life-threatening illnesses) is well rewarded in both the weeklies and monthlies.

Spooky moments

A whole array of magazines exist exploring the spiritual side of life. They publish well-targeted true tales of ghostly happenings, miracles and psychic moments and are keen to find people who have experienced them.

Readers love tips

Anything that can save them money, enhance and simplify their lives or make them look younger, more attractive, thinner. Many magazines publish tips. The knack to getting tips in print is to think and plan ahead. Christmas tips are needed in June for the monthlies, at least six to eight weeks ahead for the weeklies. Each season write up your filler or tip to send off the following year. It's harder to think of tips out of season and it's amazing how quickly another year comes around.

Photos sell

You don't need to be a budding snapper either. Take a picture of your tip, or you using it – it nets more money. Is there anything in your home you'd like valued? Take a photo, add a brief description to send off to the 'trash or treasure?' style pages. Does your child or grandchild look cute or funny in a photo? Have they said something hilarious? If you think so, chances are readers will coo or laugh over it too. Have you ever taken a picture of someone in front of a funny road sign or place name? Pet pictures are always in demand.

Nostalgia

Memories pay. Have you met anyone famous in your past? Do you have fascinating tales to tell of times gone by especially from the 1930s to the 80s? Does something in your house or garden have an amazing history? Grandparents are often a good source for nostalgia style stories.

Be nosy

The funniest comments are often those we overhear in queues and on public transport. Listen to friends' or family anecdotes that you can then rehash and send off with names and recognisable details altered.

Presently there are markets for all the above filler categories in magazines and newspapers. Find the ones that suit you and your writing ability, send them off regularly and wait for the cheques to roll in. **W**

TOP TIPS

- Study the magazine's writing style and the types of fillers they currently publish.
- Word count is essential. Count the longest and shortest letter printed and aim to keep within that wordage.
- Think seasonally. Write in the season to send off for the following season.
- Look through old photos to jog your memory for ideas.
- Be prolific. In this case the more written, the more potentially published.