



# Rejection: it's not always a bad thing

by Julie H. Ferguson

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**R**ejection rarely bothers me anymore – I see it merely as an occupational reality. We've all heard the details of J.K. Rowling's struggle to get the *Harry Potter* series accepted and media stories like the one below. I find them comforting – they put my rejections into perspective.

*The newspaper in Calcutta, India, carried out a sting, sending the opening chapters of two Booker Prize-winning novels to 20 London agents and publishers: Stanley Middleton's Holiday (he shared the Booker with Nadine Gordimer in 1974) and V.S. Naipaul's In a Free State (1971). Many did not reply at all, and the ones who did...rejected both. Nobody recognized the authors. (The Telegraph, Jan 13/2006)*

Writers must develop a coping strategy (a thick skin) for dealing with turndowns. Rejection is an inevitable consequence of submissions, whether you are sending out articles or book proposals. Sometimes you receive a form rejection letter; often, nothing; and occasionally a personalized rejection. If rejection sends you into a dead faint, here is a dose of smelling salts: don't take it personally!

Rejection can have myriad causes. The list below is not complete by any means:

- Your book doesn't fit the publisher's list one year from now.
- A similar article was published four months ago.
- The editor is angry at their spouse/mother/child....
- The editor is overwhelmed with deadlines and unsolicited mss.
- Your style doesn't fit the publication's requirements.
- The editor knows his competition has just bought a similar ms.
- You failed to convince the editor of your promotional skills.
- The editor liked your idea but not your query letter.

Whatever the reason, if you write reasonably well, rejection of your work means, for that single instant in time, the 'fit' isn't there and it is only ONE person's opinion. Think of rejection this way: *a server in a restaurant offers you coffee after dinner. You decline. The server does not feel rejected because you simply prefer tea.*

Rejections also can have a positive side. They may make you dig deeper, opening up more and better markets, as well as other opportunities.

**Remember this too:** if an editor rejects a piece of yours with a short note, take it as BIG encouragement. If the editor also tells you why s/he declined your submission, fix the deficiencies and resubmit it. This response signals your readiness to revise and try again, as well as perhaps the beginning of a relationship. You should make this your standard operating procedure.