# Submitit: Overview and “The Platform”

# Overview

Submitit helps writers get their work published in literary journals. A little background: “Literary journals” (sometimes called “lit mags”) are magazines that publish short stories (“literary fiction”) and essays (“creative nonfiction”). Some are print, some online, some publish a few times a year, some daily. There are hundreds of them across the U.S., Canada, and the world. Writers “submit” stories (and essays, etc.) to these journals in the hopes of getting published. But the process is difficult, time-consuming, and involves much guesswork, and rejections are common.

Submitit (www.submititnow.com) handles the whole submission process. Here’s how things *currently* work:

* The client signs up and uploads a story or essay, using an online form (via our website).
* We send an e-invoice from Wix.
* We create a client page in our **Client Database** (more on this below) for each story.
* We create a “shared email” (Gmail), which we use on behalf of the client (for submissions and for setting up accounts at other submission sites). We set up email forwarding and an email filter so that all emails automatically forward to Submitit’s main email (info@submititnow.com) and to the client’s personal email. See more about shared emails below.
* We read the client’s story/essay, format it, and, most importantly, score it in several categories (see Story Information under Journal Database below). We also often edit the story, an optional service.
* We plug the story’s “scores” into our **Algorithm**, which is linked to our **Journal Database** (this is all currently just an excel spreadsheet) and get a list of journals based on several filters and organized by “match scores.” More about the Algorithm and Journal Database below.
* We manually submit the story, on behalf of the client, to high-match journals (as given by the Algorithm). Most journals—probably around 60%—use a service called Submittable, but there are several other submission platforms, including, often, plain old email. We usually submit in two rounds, months apart (starting with better, but less accessible, journals in the first round; the second round is for easier and often newer journals). Some clients request a third round (or more).
* We keep track of the journal replies (in the Client Database).
* We update clients periodically with check-in emails, mostly templates. (Pop-ups in our Client Database tell us when to send these emails.)

# The Submitit Platform

The Submit Platform will streamline much of the above. It will include three databases (Client Database, Journal Database, and (new) Subscriber Database) and the Algorithm (see below). I’ll get into each of these in detail:



# Journal Database

* The Journal Database includes information about journals, including stories from these journals. Some of the information comes from an independent website called Duotrope. Other information, including Story Information, is inputted manually.
* **Display and sorting**:
  + Each journal should be a row. The information that should be visible on a main screen is indicated with an asterisk below (\*) (these would be headings). Additional information should be accessed by clicking the row (or journal name).
  + We should be able to sort by any visible column.
* **Journal Information**:
  + **Journal name**\*: click to see more information.
  + **Journal rating\***: 1 to 5 stars; set by me, based on my sense of the “quality” of the journal
  + Information that could display in some way other than in columns:
    - **Last checked**: dropdown date
    - **Open for fiction submissions?**: click for yes (i.e., default unselected)
    - **Open for nonfiction submissions?**: click for yes (i.e., default unselected)
    - **Fiction only?**:click for yes (i.e., default unselected)
    - **Nonfiction only?**:click for yes (i.e., default unselected)
    - **Online submissions?**: click for no (i.e., default selected)
    - **Simultaneous submissions?**: click for no (i.e., default selected)
    - **Flash**: the number of flash fiction pieces allowed, including “0”
    - **Defunct?** click for yes (i.e., default unselected)
    - **Not included?** click for yes (i.e., default unselected); this is so I can keep track of journals that I’ve decided not to include in the database.
  + **Year of inception\***: year dropdown (include “unknown”)
  + **Actual acceptance percent\*** (from Duotrope): if Duotrope doesn’t display a percentage, I’ll assume 5%.
  + **Submission volume\*** (from Duotrope): number of submissions in past 12 months, according to Duotrope (including 0)
  + **Minimum length\***: min. number of words
  + **Maximum length\***: max. number of words
  + **Style\***: small text field: this is usually just a few words about the journal; e.g., “experimental” or “topical/margins”)
  + **Journal information\***: dropdown (allow for multiple choices at once): {possible themes, unresponsive, slow}
  + **Notes about journal (\*?)**: text field: this is usually a paragraph or two; could be a pop-up, perhaps connected to the journal name.
  + **Submission details**:
    - **Submission platform**: could be a dropdown (one choice): {Submittable, email (paste), email (attach), own manager, online form, Google forms, Duosuma, Oleada, Moksha, other [with fill-in option]}
    - **Submission guidelines**: could be a dropdown allowing for multiple selections: {blind, no page numbers, single-space, 1.5-space, file name [with fill-in option], email subject [with fill-in option], pdf only, block paragraphs, indented paragraphs, check for possible themes, check for permanent theme [with fill-in option], other [w/ fill-in option]}
    - **Submission cost (dollars)**: could be a dropdown
  + **Theme?**: date and text field
  + **Stories\***: number of stories analyzed: automatically counts the number of stories analyzed for each journal (see Story Information below).
  + **Anthologies\***: number of stories analyzed from anthologies: also automatic (see Story information below).
  + **Dummy story?\*** (yes or no) (see Story information below)
    - A small text field for why I used a “dummy story” (i.e., I created scores based on something other than a story, usually descriptions on the journal’s website)
  + **Add story**\*: Each journal should have a button that will open a Story scoring page.
  + **Story scoring**: There should be a way to sort journals by their average scores in one or more categories (see below).
* **Story Information (for story scoring)**: Each story is linked to a journal. (The Algorithm will average these scores and use them to find match scores for a client’s story. See Algorithm later.)
  + **Display**:
    - This is really a separate database. I’d like to be able to access the data, although I probably rarely will.
    - The column headers would include {journal name, story title} as well as the information below.
    - When adding a story (see “Add story” button above), a screen should open for adding just one story (see below).
  + Here are the inputs for each story (these should all be visible on a story scoring page):
    - **Journal:** auto-filled
    - **Story title**
    - **Year:** I’ll manually enter the year of the story (not the year I enter the information)
    - **Anthology?** click for yes (i.e., default unselected)
      * if yes: dropdown: {BASS, Pushcart, O. Henry, Best Net, Best Small Fictions, Non-Required, other [w/ fill-in]}
    - **Dummy?** click for yes (i.e., default unselected)
    - **Primary criteria (1–5)**
      * Craft: 1–5 (as discussed later (Algorithm), this one is weighted by a factor of 3)
      * Lyricism: 1–5
      * Difficulty: 1–5
      * Topicality: 1–5
      * Experimentation: 1–5
      * Humor: 1–5
      * Oddness: 1–5
      * Darkness: 1–5
    - **Secondary criteria (1–3):**
      * International: 1–3
      * Marginalized Voices: 1–3
      * Historical: 1–3
      * Long: 1–3
      * Short (flash): 1–3

## Auto-updating of the Journal Database:

As mentioned above, I have to update information in the Journal Database manually, using data from a site called Duotrope. Most importantly, I update whether a journal is open or closed once a week, from an email sent by Duotrope. Ideally, the following could somehow be updated automatically (all of this information is on Duotrope, for each journal):

* **Open for fiction submissions?**
* **Open for nonfiction submissions?**
* **Online submissions?**
* **Simultaneous submissions?**
* **Defunct?**
* **Actual acceptance percent**
* **Submission volume**
* **Length**: min and max

# Algorithm

* The Algorithm should do a few things:
  + Filter the journals in the Journals Database, depending on the following inputs *and* information from the client’s Story (see Client Database):
    - **Journal rating**: show only journals with the selected ratings {1, 2, 3, 4, and/or 5 stars} (user can select multiple ratings)
    - **Open for (fiction or nonfiction) submissions**: show only journals that are *open* (depending on whether the story in question is fiction or nonfiction) and that are *not* found on the “defunct” or “not included” lists.
    - **Online submissions?** default: yes (i.e., show only journals that accept online submissions)
    - **Simultaneous submissions?** default: yes (i.e., show only journals that accept simultaneous submissions)
    - **Length**: show only journals that accept the length of the story in question
  + In addition, Journals should be **excluded** for any of the following reasons:
    - The Journal is already “active” for a client (see Client Database).
    - The Journal is part of a “do not submit” list (in case the client has submitted the story herself); this list is part of the Client Database (see below).
    - The Journal was labeled either “rejected” or “accepted” (but not “withdrawn”) in the past **4 months** for any of the client’s stories.
  + Sort journals by Match Percentage, from greatest to least (see below).
* The **Match Score** is described below. This is a score between 0% and 100%. The March Score is used to order the filtered entries above.

## Match Score

* The **match score**, which we use to determine the best journals for submitting a client’s story, is calculated using three sub scores: main score, bonus score, and new journal score.
* **main score**: The main score is found by comparing the client’s Story’s scores (see Client Database) with the average of the **journal’s story scores** (see Journal Database). It is the sum of the absolute value of the difference of each story criteria mentioned in the Journal Database. This will be a number between 0 and 52 (0 means a perfect match; 52 means a perfect non-match).
* **bonus score**: The bonus score is determined by the journal’s actual acceptance percent and actual submission volume (according to Duotrope) (see Journal Database). Here are the steps (you can obviously program this to be one step):
  + First find the IDs using Table 1 (one for acceptance % and one for volume). (Note: I only do this to make Table 2 easier to read.)
  + Then find the row in Table 2 that corresponds to the two IDs. This is the bonus score (between 0% and 10%).

| Table 1 | | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ID | acceptance % | volume |
| 5  4  3  2  1 | (10, ∞)  (5, 10]  (3, 5]  [1, 3]  (0, 1) | (200, ∞)  (100, 200]  (50, 100]  (10, 50]  (0, 10] |

| Table 2 | | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| acc % | vol. | **bonus (%)** |
| 5  5  5  5  5 | 5  4  3  2  1 | **10%**  **9%**  **8%**  **7%**  **6%** |
| 4  4  4  4  4 | 5  4  3  2  1 | **9%**  **8%**  **7%**  **6%**  **5%** |
| 3  3  3  3  3 | 5  4  3  2  1 | **5%**  **5%**  **5%**  **5%**  **5%** |
| 2  2  2  2  2 | 5  4  3  2  1 | **1%**  **2%**  **3%**  **4%**  **5%** |
| 1  1  1  1  1 | 5  4  3  2  1 | **0%**  **1%**  **2%**  **3%**  **4%** |

* **new journal score**: If the difference between the current year and a journal’s year of inception is less than or equal to 1, the match score gets a **5%** bonus. (For example, if the current year is 2023, all journals with inception years of 2022 or 2023 get the 5% bonus.) (See Journal Database.)
* **calculating the match score**:

**match score = 0.90 + [(−0.02) × main score] + bonus score + new journal score**

# Client Database

* This is where we store “client” information (including financials) and “Story” information (scores, submissions, cover letters, etc.). (It’s currently a Google Sheet; each story is a tab.)
* **Client information** (as usual, \* = required field):
  + Name (First Last)\*
  + Pen Name
  + Email\*
  + Address\*
  + Phone\*
  + Shared email (created by Submitit)
  + Password (should be unique for each client; created by Submitit; used for shared email and all submission accounts; may be shared with the client—perhaps there’s a way to secure this password, in case the database gets hacked?)
  + Correspondence (general) (text field with dates)
* **Story Information**: One client may have multiple stories. Each story will be a “page” in the database. Below is information for each story (all manually entered):
  + **Correspondence** (story related) (text field with dates)
  + **Story title**: Note: titles sometimes change.
  + **Project flow**: see below.
  + **Story information**: 13 numbers (see “story information” in the Journal Database section, above). These scores are required before running the story through the algorithm.
  + **Story genre** (dropdown): currently just “fiction” or “nonfiction”
  + **Submission strategy** (dropdown): “top,” “mid-range,” “accessible” (should probably also have a manual write-in option)
  + **Word count**
  + Final version saved (checkbox)
  + Final word count checked (checkbox)
  + **Do not submit list** (see Algorithm above): these should be selections from the Journal Database.
  + **Notes from client** (text field)
  + **Story blurb**: from the client (this should be part of the Client Portal (for more about the Client Portal, see below))
  + **Bio** (this should be part of the Client Portal)
  + **Cover letter** (text field): We create this, based on Story Blurb and Bio. It should be easy to copy and paste when submitting.
  + **Algorithm button (bottom of main page?)**: This button will create a list of journals.
    - See “Algorithm” above. This is where the algorithm is used, and where the results will be displayed.
    - The following information should be visible for each journal (see Journal Database above): match percent, journal name, journal rating, year of inception, actual acceptance percent, submission volume, style, notes, flash, submission details, themes (if any)
    - When we submit to a journal, we should click a button “submitted,” add a date (default: today), and the journal’s status automatically becomes “active” (see below).
  + **Story Submission Report (new page?)**: A reports page should display all submissions for a story. Each journal to which the story was submitted should be indicated with the submission date (which was added when the “submitted” button was clicked above).
    - There should be a dropdown to change the **journal status** from “active” to: {“rejected” (with date), “withdrawn” (with date), or “accepted” (with date)}. So every journal has one date if active, and two dates if rejected, withdrawn, or accepted.
    - The following information should be visible: status; submission date; response date (if the piece has been rejected/withdrawn/accepted); journal name, journal rating, year of inception, actual acceptance percent, submission volume, style, notes, flash, submission details, theme?
  + **Client Submission Report (access from main client page?)**:
    - There should be a way to show all submissions for a client for all of the client’s stories. This should be sortable, similar to a spreadsheet (especially by status, submission date, response date (if any), journal name, and journal rating). Of course, the story title should now be added to the information.
  + Currently we store all story drafts on Google Drive, but it would be great if they could be stored in the Client Database, easily identifiable for each client’s story.

## Project Flow

For each client, a number of regular tasks occur at set times. Many of these tasks are emails from us. These emails should be automated (they will often include updates about the current status of the submissions for a particular story). I’ll provide templates, of course, and clarify the information to grab.

* Each task below should include a date (automatic or manual) to show completion. The number in parentheses is the number of days to wait (the interval) between *completion* of tasks; more on this below.
  + **First email**: automated, when a client signs up (interval: n/a)
  + **Invoice sent**: Invoices should include a brief description: automated? (interval: 0 days (at sign up))
  + **Invoice paid**: automated? (n/a; this could be attached to Invoice sent, if convenient; in other words, it can change color or show a “PAID,” with the paid date.)
  + **Create shared email**: manual (0 days (once the invoice is paid))
  + **Email updated story**: manual (30 days)
  + **Algorithm 1 + email**: manual (7 days)
  + **Create client email filter**: manual (2 days)
  + **Submissions 1**: manual (0 days (we’ll create the client filter when we submit, so these are “due” at the same time))
  + **Email check-in 1**: automated (21)
  + **Email check-in 2**: automated (21)
  + **Email check-in 3**: automated (21)
  + **Email check-in 4**: automated (28)
  + **Algorithm 2 + email**: manual (21)
  + **Submissions 2**: manual (2)
  + **Email check-in 5**: automated (42)
  + **Email check-in 6 (last email)**: automated (42)
* **More on project flow:**
  + **Due notices**: For manual tasks above, there should be a dashboard showing all tasks due for completion, with a link to the client’s page.
  + **Change order of tasks**: We should be able to drag tasks up or down. For example, clients often request that we move Submissions 2 earlier in the process.
  + **Change intervals**:
    - We should be able to easily change the interval for any task (for a given client).
    - We should also be able to relatively easily change the *default* intervals listed above, for all future clients. These things change from time to time.
  + **Change templates**: There should be a relatively easy way for me to change the email templates from time to time.
  + **Add tasks**: We should be able to add a task, either at the bottom of the flow, or somewhere else. The most common addition is an extra service (and thus an extra “Invoice sent” and “Invoice paid”). Another common addition is the following, added below “Email check-in 6.” It would be convenient to add this with a click (“Round 3”):
    - **Algorithm 3 + email**: manual (0)
    - **Submissions 3**: manual (2)
    - **Email check-in (generic)**: automated (28)
    - **Email check-in (generic)**: automated (28)
    - **Email check-in (generic)**: automated (28)
    - **Email check-in (generic)**: automated (28)

## Client Portal

* The client portal could be developed later.
* **Story Submission Report**: The client portal should allow clients to log in and see the current status of each of their stories (see Story Submission Report above). For each story, they should be able to see the following (this is the same as above, but with a few removed and a couple of changes):
  + Status: Again, this will be one of the following: {active, rejected, withdrawn, or accepted}.
  + Submission date
  + Response date (if the piece has been rejected/withdrawn/accepted)
  + Journal name
  + Year of inception
  + Approximate acceptance percent: This is the score we share with clients, based on the actual acceptance percent (from Duotrope): {< 1%, 1–3%, 3–5%, >5%}. Note: if the percent is 1%, use 1–3%, and if the percent is 3% or 5%, use 3–5%.
  + Approximate submission volume (for client): We’ll share the following categories, based on the actual submission volume: {[0,10] = “very low”, (10, 50] = “low”, (50, 100] = “medium”, (100, 200] = “high”, (200, ∞) = “very high”}.
* **Client Submission Report:**
  + The client should also be able to see all stories at once, with the same information as the Story Submission Report (but with the story title added). If possible, this could be sortable, similar to a spreadsheet (especially by status, submission date, response date (if any), journal name, and journal rating), but for clients, I’m not sure this is necessary.
* The client portal should also allow for the following:
  + Signups and story uploads (replacing the current Sign Up form on our website).
  + Payments, based on client inputs (replacing the current system of sending invoices manually). Both of these can happen later (and you’ll need more information, of course).

## More about shared emails:

* I use a shared email for two reasons:
  + I believe some journals will dislike receiving submissions from a submissions service such as Submitit. The emails should appear to be from the individual writer, not a business (that is, no “[writer]@submititnow.com”).
  + I need to create individual submission accounts (such as with Submittable) for each client, so I need separate emails.
* Because Google often requires “phone verification,” and because I’m out of allowable verifications for my phone, we create these emails on our mobile phones. It’s always worked, but I do worry about the scalability of this step, and I also worry about Google clamping down on me someday, but I haven’t come up with an easy alternative. My workaround, if I eventually run into difficulties, is to ask clients to create their own shared Gmail accounts (I’ll supply clear instructions), to which we will have access. But *not* relying on clients to do this is preferable. I’m open to suggestions. So far, no one has come up with anything better than the current system.

# Subscription Service (Subscriber Database):

I’d like clients to be able to access the Algorithm themselves, as part of a monthly subscription. This will look similar to the Client Database.

* Below is the **client information** (to be viewed by Submitit). This is the same as for regular clients above, “shared email” and “password” can be grayed out; I’ll highlight what is new:
  + Name (First Last)\*
  + Pen Name
  + Email\*
  + Address\*
  + Phone\*
  + Shared email (created by Submitit)
  + Password (should be unique for each client; created by Submitit; used for shared email and all submission accounts; may be shared with the client—perhaps there’s a way to secure this password, in case the database gets hacked?)
  + Correspondence (general) (text field with dates)
  + Subscription client? (yes or no; default no) (see below for the Subscription Service)
  + Subscription service: I suspect I’ll have multiple services, but this is currently TBD.
* **Story Information**: One client may have multiple stories. Below is the story information. This is similar to the story information section above, but I’ll gray out the sections that should be removed. Note that this section must be accessible to the client (unlike the “story information” section for regular clients above).
  + Correspondence (story related) (text field with dates)
  + Invoice(s) sent: with story title, service, amounts, dates sent, dates paid
  + Email records: titles of the pre-written email templates, with dates (when sent)
  + Story title: Note: titles sometimes change.
  + Story information: 13 numbers (see “story information” in the Journal Database section, above). These scores are required before running the story through the algorithm.
  + Story genre (dropdown): currently just “fiction” or “nonfiction”
  + Submission strategy (dropdown): “top,” “mid-range,” “accessible” (should probably also have a manual write-in option)
  + Word count
  + Final version saved (checkbox)
  + Final word count checked (checkbox)
  + Do not submit list (see Algorithm above): selections from the Journal Database.
  + Notes from client (text field)
  + Story blurb: from the client (this should be part of the Client Portal (for more about the Client Portal, see below))
  + Bio (this should be part of the Client Portal)
  + Cover letter: We create this, based on Story Blurb and Bio. It should be easy to copy and paste when submitting.
* The “Run Algorithm” Button, Story Submission Report, and Client Submission Report should all work the same as described above under Client Database. [I need to decide whether we should show all information or just the information the regular clients can see. I’m thinking the latter.]