

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT LETTER

Dear Writer,

I'm delighted that you'll be able to do the contact lens story—lucky for us you've had so many problems with your lenses! The first-person approach that you use for so many of your pieces will work really well on this one.

To recap what we discussed, the piece should provide enough information that a reader can decide whether to get lenses, figure out which kind is best, and learn enough to talk to an eye doctor about it all. Your story will cover these areas by using your own experience as the backbone and to provide appropriate jumping off points into the discussion. It seems to me the best way to structure the story is “My Quest for the Perfect Lens.”

As we discussed, the story should include:

- Some tidbits on the history of contacts, but not an entire chronology
- A brief run-down on the variety of lenses, especially new developments
- Why lenses instead of glasses
- How lenses correct vision (and if they halt the progression of myopia or can reverse it)
- Soft vs. hard; the soft revolution; the rigid gas permeable revolution; the extended wear revolution
- Who can wear lenses and why some people can't
- Long-term problems of lenses; what they do to your corneas after 20 years; the nasty bugs that can cause infections
- Briefly, what to expect in an exam

The more important areas, I think, are the discussions of why lenses instead of glasses, soft vs. hard, who can wear lenses, and the long-term problems. Please capitalize on your experiences—the “contact attack” on the highway, your “zoo decision” to ditch lenses after so many years. You should have a lot of fun and still get across tons of information. The only thing that worries me is that your vision sounds somewhat unusual—you might want to ask your doctor and some others who have examined you whether your eyes are particularly hard to fit. If so, you should mention this in the story, and be sure to broaden the discussion so that folks with more regular eyes don't feel left out.

Description of the likely structure.

Clear statement of what's to be covered.

The story's most critical points.

Anything you're worried about.

Just to remind you, the sidebars (which we'll do in-house) will be: a chart of the varieties of lenses, expensive vs. cheap optometrists, and tips for lens and eye care. Enclosed are your contract, information about how to annotate the story for fact-checking (please take this seriously; we've had so many problems lately!), some background stories, and some articles from recent issues that might serve as models for your piece. The cosmetic dentistry story is especially appropriate—we really loved both the approach and the depth of information.

Background material and model articles.

Also, so you know what's ahead, here's how our process works: Within a week after your manuscript comes in, I'll read it very quickly and tell the editor-in-chief (and you) my initial reaction. Then we'll schedule it to be discussed by the senior editors at a manuscript meeting, probably two weeks or so after receiving the ms. I'll tell you the verdict: If the story is accepted at the meeting, I'll request payment; if it's not accepted, well, then we'll talk about what it may take to get it accepted. If the story's accepted and we schedule it immediately, I'll get back to you within a couple more weeks about questions or revisions. But—just so you're forewarned—it may not be scheduled right away and that means I may not get to the revisions for a couple of months. In either case, you should annotate the manuscript for fact-checking and send in your research materials. We can take care of sources for revisions later on.

What's ahead:
Editorial process, scheduling, and magazine logistics.

After you and I have worked on revisions, I'll send you a copy of my edit and we can discuss it. Then the fact-checker goes over the piece with a fine-toothed comb and I'll talk to you about any problems she's encountered. Next it goes to the copy desk and then to the editor-in-chief for top edit. I'll get back to you with any changes either of them makes. If we have to trim to fit the layout, I'll let you know. You'll also get to see the final layout—or as close to final as I can manage—to make sure the head, deck, and call-outs are true to the story.

Again, thanks for taking on the assignment. I'm really looking forward to working with you on this. I'll be happy to talk at any point along the way, if you have questions, problems, or just want to hash out an idea.

Cheers,