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FORMATTING A MANUSCRIPT

by Beth Stilborn, Flubs2Fixes Freelance Editing

Here are the basics for formatting manuscripts for submission to editors or agents. These guidelines apply to most manuscripts from picture book to adult fiction.

They apply whether you're sending a manuscript to a freelance copy editor (like me), to a developmental editor, to a publisher, or to an agent.

Always read the submission guidelines carefully and send what the particular recipient requires.

Use **Times New Roman 12-point** font, in **black** throughout. Use **ONE space between sentences**, not two as was the previous standard when typewriters were used. Also use one space after a colon.

Double space your entire manuscript, other than the address information on the title page. Don't put extra spaces between paragraphs.

Use a **one-inch margin** on all sides. If your word processing program defaults to 1.25″, that is fine.

Leave the **right side ragged** (not justified).

The first page is the **title page**.

- Put your name and address in the top left corner, single-spaced. Do not put this in a header.

- In the top right corner, indicate word count and date last revised.

- Halfway down the page, center your title (usually all upper case) with your byline two lines down, also centered.

For a **novel**, use a page break to move to the next page, go down a couple of inches from the top margin, and begin your first chapter (double spaced).

For **picture books**, you may start your double-spaced document immediately following the title, OR you can start it on the page after the title page. Type the text as a continuous document, with standard paragraph breaks. Typically a 500-word picture book will use two or three pages. This is completely acceptable.

Create a **header** that gives your surname, the title of your book, and the page number. When you format the page number, ensure that it is formatted not to print on the first page. This will keep the entire header off the title page.

Format the header thus: Surname/Title of Book   2

Do not include a copyright statement. Your work is copyrighted as soon as you write it, and agents and publishers see the inclusion of such a copyright statement as the mark of an amateur.

Submissions by regular postal mail are exceedingly rare these days. You will likely be querying by email or by form.

In an **email submission** to a publisher or agent, DO NOT send your manuscript as an attachment. For a picture book, simply append the text of your manuscript in the body of the email after your query letter. For a novel, append the sample the submission guidelines require in the same way.

Some agents now require **submission by form**, either through Query Manager, or through a form on the agency website. In that case, copy/paste the picture book manuscript or the novel sample in the box provided. Keep it double spaced.

N.B. Regarding illustrations for picture book and chapter book writers

- Unless you are also an illustrator, do **not** submit or include illustrations with your manuscript.

- If you are seeking traditional publication, the publisher will choose your illustrator.

- Do **not** arrange for an illustrator on your own unless you are planning to self/independently publish.

On the following pages you will find a few resources to consult for further information, followed by a formatting sample to illustrate the points made above. Note that although my copyright information does not appear in the footer of the sample, it is still covered by the same copyright statement. The sample is done to appear as close as possible to the way you will format your own manuscript.

RESOURCES (Print and Online)

Print Resource:

A good guide for any kind of submission is *Formatting & Submitting Your Manuscript* by Chuck Sambuchino and the editors of Writer's Digest Books, Third Edition, published by Writer's Digest Books in 2009.

Online Resources:

Manuscript Format Basics on freelance editor Harold Underdown's website:
http://www.underdown.org/manuscript-format.htm

Format Your Novel for Submission on The Editor's Blog:
http://theeditorsblog.net/2011/01/05/format-your-novel-for-submission/

FirstName LastName

Address

City, State, Zip Code

Phone number

emailaddress

XX words

Date

TITLE OF MANUSCRIPT

by FirstName LastName

CHAPTER ONE

Use Times New Roman, Arial or a similar font, 12 point.

Set up a header with your LastName/TITLE at the left margin, and insert a page number to appear at the right margin. The header and page number should not appear on the title page, so when you format your header title, be sure that "Different First Page" is checked in the Header/Footer format toolbar, and "page number should appear on first page" is UNchecked in the Page Number format dialog box. Consult "Help" for your word processing software if you're uncertain how to do this.

On the title page of your manuscript, type your name then tab across to the right side of the page and type the word count. Single space return to type your street address then tab across to the right side of the page and type the date. If you want to, you can include the genre in the next line on the right. Use a combination of tabbing and space bar spaces to make the word count and date (and genre if you are adding it) align right. This is the only time you will align right in the entire document. The main text of the manuscript will be left-aligned, right ragged.

After you have entered your contact information, single-spaced, and your word count, date and genre, change to double spacing. Hit return a few times to get you to the approximate middle of the page. Type your title in all capitals, do shift-return to go down to the next line without it automatically capitalizing the first word and type by FirstName LastName.

For a picture book, you may simply go down a couple of returns and start your manuscript on the title page, or, if you prefer to start your manuscript on a clean page, hit return once after the title, and insert a page break. Begin your manuscript on the new page. Always double space your picture book manuscript. Don't put extra space between paragraphs or to indicate page breaks unless an agent or editor specifically asks you to do so. Simply type in normal double-spaced paragraphs until you reach the end of your manuscript. For most picture books of 500-600 words, this will be two or three pages of double-spaced typing.

For both picture book and novel, the standard spacing is double spaced, with just one space between sentences.

For a novel, after the title, hit return once more, and insert a page break. Do not use multiple returns to get to the next page. Between title page and first chapter, and between chapters, use page breaks to get to the next page.

On the new page, use the return to go down about 2 inches, click to choose center, and type your chapter heading. This may be a simple CHAPTER ONE, you may be using individual chapter titles, or you may be doing a combination of both. Whichever you are doing, type the chapter heading then hit return once and begin typing the text of your manuscript.

Your entire manuscript should be double-spaced, with no extra spaces between paragraphs. Use the preset tab to indent each paragraph. The tab is set at .5 inch, which is the standard.

When you reach the end of a chapter, insert a page break to go to the next page, and follow the instructions for beginning a chapter to start your next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

When there is dialogue in your manuscript, each speaker should have a separate paragraph. Use quotation marks "thus" around the speech lines. For example, "It's important to remember the quotation marks both at the beginning of a speech and at the end," said Beth.

"Where should I put the punctuation?" the author asked.

Beth said, "The punctuation stays inside the quotation marks in standard U.S. format. The U.K. uses quotation marks differently, but if you're American or Canadian, you will follow the U.S. standard."

"What about the dialogue tag? Where does it go, and how do I punctuate it?" asked the author.

Beth said, "If the dialogue tag comes before the speech, put a comma after the tag, before the quotation mark."

"On the other hand, if the dialogue tag comes after the speech, the comma will go after the speech sentence, but before the quotation mark," said Beth.

Within the speech sentence or sentences, use standard punctuation.

If you have a footnote, type whatever is to be footnoted, then click on Insert Footnote In the Word menu (in contrast to the menu at the top of the document).[1] Word will automatically

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[1] Book title, by Author's Name, Location of Publisher, Publisher, Date, page X

add the number after your sentence and jump to the foot of the page where you can add your

reference note.

No matter how long or short your chapter is, use a page break to get to the next page to

start your next chapter. Be sure you don't accidentally hit "blank page" or you will have a blank

page between your chapters. Your chapters should flow along easily, following the same format

throughout the manuscript, unless you are doing a specialized form of manuscript such as a verse

novel. This document shows only formatting for the standard form of manuscript.

CHAPTER THREE

Continue with the same formatting until you reach the end of your novel. If you have

backmatter, such as books you want to reference, a note from the author, a glossary or any other

such additional material, separate it from the main text of the manuscript, whether picture book

or novel, with a page break in the same way as you would for a new chapter.

For such backmatter, consult a book such as *Formatting & Submitting Your

Manuscript* by Chuck Sambuchino and the editors of Writer's Digest Books, Third Edition, for

formatting information.

If you wish, you may indicate the end of your manuscript with the words The End. This

phrase is usually capitalized and centered.

THE END