



FORMATTING



Formatting Your Manuscript

What Should Your Manuscript Look Like?

Until this point we haven't discussed what your manuscript—the printed rough draft of your novel—should look like. Many beginning writers try to format their manuscript based on assumptions about how it will look if and when it's published. This is a waste of time.

There is a standard for manuscript format—the format expected by editors at publishing houses. This is what they expect to see when they receive a submission in the mail. Now, the standard isn't carved in stone. To the best of my knowledge it doesn't exist anywhere as a list of definite rules. Instead, it is the format a majority of editors have come to expect over time. You could probably deviate from it a little without annoying most editors, but the farther you get from the norm, the more unprofessional your manuscript will look. Keep in mind that various publishing houses have slightly different standards, so it is always prudent to read a publisher's submission guidelines before printing off a manuscript for submission.

Anyway, the point of manuscript format is ease of reading and correcting for those evaluating your novel. I strongly suggest that you put your novel into manuscript format. You would do well to write in manuscript format once you understand what it is.

Paper and ink: Use black ink on plain white copy or typing paper. Do not use anything other than black ink on white paper. Black ink. White paper. Your manuscript should look typed, even though it will probably be printed from a computer. This means it will not be handwritten. Never, ever submit a handwritten story on lined notebook paper. It will not even be read, so don't waste your time and postage.

Margins: Set your margins at one inch on every side. White space is your friend. Nothing hurts the eyes more than a page stuffed with text.

Justification: Always left-justify. This means the left side of every page of text will be straight, with each line beginning in the same place (except for the first line of every paragraph, which will be indented).

Font: Use 12-point *Times New Roman* or *Courier New*. Do not use anything else. Most especially do not use any of the fun and exotic fonts that came with your word processor. 12-point *Times New Roman* or *Courier New* may look boring, but your novel isn't. You must let the words themselves carry your story. Using fancy fonts creates the impression that your story isn't interesting all by itself. Fancy fonts are the hallmark of amateurs. Besides, *Times New Roman* and *Courier New* are easy on the eyes, and you should make reading your story as easy as possible for anyone who takes the time to pick it up and read it.

For many years, the *Courier* font family was preferred for manuscripts. This is because *Courier* is a monospace font, which means all the letters take up the same amount of space. *W* takes the same space as *i*. This may seem wasteful, but it makes editing much easier, and gives a more consistent word count per printed page. However, in the past decade, *Times New Roman* has become an acceptable alternative to *Courier New*, even though it is not a monospace font.

Spacing: Always double-space between lines. Do not single-space. Do not triple-space. Double-spacing leaves room for editorial corrections and comments.

Printing: Print only on one side of the page. Never submit double-sided manuscripts unless asked to do so.

Headers: Place a header on every page except the first. The header, which will print approximately half an inch from the top of the page, will consist of your last name, a dash or slash, your novel's title or a keyword from the title, another dash or slash, and the page number. The page number should be right-justified; it should print in the upper right-hand corner of every page.

Indenting: The first line of every paragraph should be indented half an inch, or five spaces, to the right.

Hyphens: Don't hyphenate words unless they are normally hyphenated. When you come to the end of a line and a word doesn't fit, relegate it to the following line instead of hyphenating. Most word processors allow you to turn off hyphenation as a preference for the whole document.

Italics: When using *Courier New*, indicate italics by underlining the word, like this. When using *Times New Roman*, use the italics version of the font.

Cover page: Novels generally have cover pages. To create a cover page, type the title about one third of the way down the page. Center it on a single line. Use all caps if you so desire, though this is not necessary. Skip two lines and type "by" and your name. Skip down to the lower third of the page and type your name, address, telephone number, and email address. Each of these should be placed on its own line, except the physical address, which will take two lines. This is the only area that will be single-spaced. All of this personal information should be left-justified, but tabbed either to the center of the page or to the right-hand side. It should look something like this:

John Doestoyefski
123 Street
City, ST 12345
(555) 123-1234
yourname@address.com



*“The waste basket is
the writer's best
friend.”*

- Isaac Bashevis Singer

Chapters: The first page of every chapter may look different from the other pages of your novel. Place the chapter title (or simply, “Chapter One”) a third of the way down the page. Skip a line and then begin your chapter. Remember to indent the first line.

On the following pages you’ll find a sample manuscript you can use as a reference for manuscript format. Notice that the pages are one-sided.

Huckleberry Finn

by Mark Twain

Mark Twain
351 Farmington Ave.
Hartford, CT 06105
(555) 123-1234
twain@marktwain.net

CHAPTER 1

You don't know about me without you have read a book by the name of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer; but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. That is nothing. I never seen anybody but lied one time or another, without it was Aunt Polly, or the widow, or maybe Mary. Aunt Polly--Tom's Aunt Polly, she is--and Mary, and the Widow Douglas is all told about in that book, which is mostly a true book, with some stretchers, as I said before.

Now the way that the book winds up is this: Tom and me found the money that the robbers hid in the cave, and it made us rich. We got six thousand dollars apiece--all gold. It was an awful sight of money when it was piled up. Well, Judge Thatcher he took it and put it out at interest, and it fetched us a dollar a day apiece all the year round--more than a body could tell what to do with. The Widow Douglas she took me for her son, and allowed she would sivilize me; but it was rough living in the house all the time, considering how dismal regular and decent the widow was in all her ways; and so when I couldn't stand it no longer I lit out. I got into my old