

## Presenting a Manuscript

### How to present a manuscript: some basic guidelines

#### INTRODUCTION

Many stories nowadays are submitted to publishers and competitions electronically, but these simple rules of presentation still apply. Your aim is for functional readability and a professional approach.

#### PRELIMINARY NOTES

Never, ever send a hand-written manuscript to an editor. Whatever sort of genius you think yourself to be, if submissions aren't typeset and neatly presented they'll go straight in the out tray (AKA wastepaper basket.)

Keep a copy of everything you send out, and make a note of to whom and when it was sent and what outcome resulted. Such records prevent you accidentally duplicating a send-out and are helpful when it is time to make your income tax return. One positive from any rejection: you can offset the cost of posting stuff that is hurtfully refused, and such losses may result in a generous tax refund. (Watch out for flying pigs!)

Every publisher, every competition secretary, every editor may also have their own in-house guidelines, tipsheets and 'how to' instructions. In any particular case, such instructions will over-ride any general guidelines, including these.

If you're still sending by mail (or this is one of those special instructions) always include an SSAE, i.e. a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

If you're submitting text by email, always check the publication's guidelines to see whether they prefer it pasted in the body of the email or as an attachment.

Try and always send to a named person, not to their job title. Stuff that is for a named individual goes into their own personal in-tray. Stuff for 'The Editor' or 'Fiction Editor' or 'Poetry Editor' goes into a general in-tray, commonly referred to as 'the slush pile' that individual editors will only tackle when their own in-tray is cleared and they have time to kill before they go home.

#### CONTACT INFO

Before starting, ensure your document has your correct contact info for follow-up from the recipient.

Your name, address, telephone number, email address, etc. should be typed into the top right hand corner. Then hit return and add the date below.

For a competition, where entries are usually anonymous (you, not the judges) this information is created on a separate sheet with a listing of the entry or entries you're submitting. Take comfort from the fact that 'Anonymous,' known to pals as 'Anon' has always been the English-speaking world's most prolific author.

#### GETTING STARTED

On the first page of a submission, centre your chosen title about one-third down, and press enter twice. Don't go overboard on font size: Pi16 works better than Pi26.

Now add your byline (i.e. your own name or a pseudonym you write under, also centred.

Now you can start writing your article.

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Call your submission by a single word or short phrase. This is a 'catchline' taken from the title or what the story is mainly about. You don't need this for non-print mailouts.

### **CREATING YOUR CATCHLINE**

Perhaps you're writing about special dates in our human lives, and you've chosen the word

'Anniversaries' from the title. Your first page will include 'anniversaries' before the pagination in the footer, so pages will read 'Anniversaries/1', 'Anniversaries/2, etc. until the end.

### **'MORE FOLLOWS'/ENDS/WORD COUNT**

It is useful to write 'mf' at the end of each page, an accepted abbreviation for more follows. This indicates there is still text to come. Also, if the reader drops the pages or a gust of wind whirls them around on the floor, they can be speedily reassembled in the proper order.

Indicate the end, by pressing enter twice to create spacing, and type in ENDS.

Immediately below add your word count, i.e.

ENDS

[WORD COUNT: 1322 words.]

Word counts are calculated on the main body of the text only - where your story or article begins to the final word with which it closes.

Again, if you exceed a requested word count, your submission or competition entry will probably not be read.

For a magazine or anthology submission, some leeway is usually allowed - perhaps 50 words either side of the preferred word count, i.e. if it says 750 words, you can probably get away with between 700-800 max.

For a competition, an exact word count is required. Do not exceed it even by one well-chosen noun or verb, or you will find yourself disqualified.

Why is word count so essential? Not only because submissions and competition entries demand it, but so when an article is sent in for consideration, editors will know exactly how many pages it will take up of the space available. For example, Freelance knows between 450 and 750 words will fit nicely on two of their A5 pages, and allow room for headings, references and even some artwork.

*mf*

### **PAPER & PRINT**

White paper only, good quality bond. None of your cheap and flimsy 'bargains' from The \$2 shop. A4 in size and use one side only.

Keep your paper clean and tidy in a drawer – you want it to be pristine.

Ensure your printer is producing good, clean print. If it's not, either replace the cartridge – preferably a recycled cartridge from Cartridge World – or load to a flashdrive (USB) and take to The Stationery Warehouse for economical printing.

### **FONT**

Use a standard font, nothing fancy - Courier is still popular with editors, or you can use the tried and tested, such as Times New Roman, Arial or Verdana. A more modern choice is Calibri and Palatino Linotype, that are read equally well in print and onscreen.

Don't use anything smaller than Pi11 for your main body text; Pi12 is often a

safer bet. You can't guarantee that someone who has been reading submissions for over a decade or two has got perfect eyesight still.

## **HEADINGS**

Headings and sub-headings can be a size or two larger (don't go overboard!) and Bold.

Underlining an emboldened heading is overkill. A little restraint is always better style.

Be consistent with headings; you have the facilitate to record and replicate with Word and most other word processing programs. Learn how to do that and save yourself time and energy in securing such consistency.

Avoid unnecessary decoration or little touches of whimsy. They don't work with hard-boiled professionals and shout 'Amateur!' to the reader.

## **SPACING & INDENTS**

Most mainstream publishers still prefer double spacing, which allows them to scribble or insert notes and queries on the manuscript itself as they read.

For most competitions or an eZine on the Web, use single spacing.

If it's fiction (novels and short stories) or creative nonfiction, do not allow spaces between paragraphs. Word automatically adds them unless you instruct it not to. Find out how to do this.

Your first paragraph is not indented; all others are, except where you choose to add a break to indicate a change of topic, place or time. The next paragraph that follows such a deliberate break is, again, not indented, though all others that come after it will revert to the normal practice of indicating a new paragraph.

If it's a business article, or a particular publication or outlet prefers spacing between, then space between you must. This is called block layout, by the way.  
*mf*

Don't make your indents too wide; it looks peculiar on the page and is distracting to the reader. Use your common sense here - and always use the indent facility, not space-space-space. This has to be taken out before a text is printed and replaced with proper indents, and that will enrage your editor, publisher and print-setter. These are not people you do not want to offend.

## **MARGINS**

Readability is not only in the content of your text, but also in the layout of your page. You need decent-sized margins, so don't attempt to economise on the number of pages by choosing 'Narrow.'

In this instance, Normal will always be correct, and you can, occasionally, get away with Moderate.

## **SENDING WORK BY POST**

Yes, some of us still do, though it's always advisable to have it available in duplicate for sending by email when requested to do so for print reproduction.

If you're sending work in by post always attach a cover sheet with your contact details, the date, and what rights\* you're offering. In the centre of

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this page give the title of the article, word count (essential) and your name.

(\* i.e. first NZ rights, e-publishing rights, etc. etc.)

Don't forget that SSAE or refused work might not come back to you.

### **ONE LAST POINT**

Yes, we're human, and we make mistakes, but nevertheless there's no excuse for errors of fact or GSP (Grammar, Spelling & Punctuation) in your manuscript, or for typos.

If a name is spelt wrong or there's a comma in the wrong place it is YOUR fault. So always check and double-check before you send your manuscript off.

It's useful to have some writing buddies – one good reason to belong to a writers' group! – who will do final checks for you in exchange for you doing final checks for them.

If it's a book manuscript it is accepted you will have had it professional edited and proofread before you send it to the publisher. If you don't respect your work enough to do this, why should they respect your work enough to read or accept it?

And no, you can't rely on Spellcheck or other freebies that come with Word, etc. Freelance notes many of its high performing contributors use Narrator (on later editions of the Word program,) or Grammarly (a paid download) to ensure their word is 100%proof.

### **THAT'S ALL, FOLKS!**

So there you have it, tedious and essential if you want to be anything more than a hobbyist or amateur. You can disregard all of this if you're writing stuff just for you – a journal or diary, for example. As soon as you go public, you have obligations.

And you can cut down on the work of reading and re-reading such instructions by creating document templates that automatically save your preferred format as default under chosen descriptors, e.g. Fiction Template, Nonfiction Template, Picturebook Template, etc., etc., etc. Many of these are available as downloadable from the Internet, often free of charge.

If being a professional is your objective, you will find more about how to achieve this with the

following practical books that should be on every writer's bookshelf or downloaded to their e-reader:

1. *New Zealand Writers Handbook*. (David Bateman.)
2. *Fit to Print : The Writing & Editing Style Guide for Aotearoa-New Zealand*. (Dunmore Press.)

Both are regularly updated so replace every now and again. Order through any bookshop in New Zealand or from Amazon online. Or if you're truly starving in a garret somewhere, consult in your local library's Reference Department.

*Written by Jenny Argante for Tauranga Writers – may be freely used with acknowledgment.*

## Giving and Getting Feedback



**Feedback** is an important function of any writers' group, and usually falls into **THREE** categories:

1. How you present your work.
2. How you give feedback.
3. How you receive that feedback.

### **Presenting your work for feedback:**

Feedback is normally done by reading aloud a selected piece of writing (1000 words max).

\* Bring extra copies (A4, double-space, one side, Arial 11 recommended) so your listeners can make notes.

\* Let listeners know if you want specific feedback e.g. "I'd like help with the dialogue, it seems

a bit stilted", or "The sentences seem to be running away with me here", or "Do you think

this character comes over OK?"

- Don't disrespect your work by pre-empting response – "It's not that good", "It's only rough at present." But do let us know who it is aimed at: reader, market, genre.

### **Giving feedback:**

Own your comments by saying, "I think ..." or "In my opinion ...", and keep your feedback short

**Commend:** say something specific about what works in the writing.

**Recommend:** comment on something in particular that you think is unclear, could be improved.

**Commend:** give an overall impression of the writing.

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**Responding to feedback:**

Not all feedback is what you want to hear but that does not make it not worth hearing.

- take comments away with you to ponder on, no one is expecting you to do everything they

suggest.

- if there is feedback you want to discuss further ask for phone numbers or emails to continue

the discussion later; this is a great way to find a writing buddy.

- we're here to support one another so remember you don't have to agree with the feedback

you are given.

- think about bringing the same piece back later, it is a good learning tool to see what feedback

was useful and what wasn't.

- **Please note:** only paid-up attending members can ask for work to be critiqued at meetings BUT as a new service postal members can send in one piece a year for feedback.