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approx. xxxx words

Standard Manuscript Format

by

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This is one form of a standard manuscript. It has one inch margins all the way around. The 'by' line is at the 5.4" place on the page, but if you want to avoid having widows on the first page, adjust the location. Editors use the white space, especially on the first page and in the margins, to write in comments so a wee bit more is usually better.

If you use automatic indentation for paragraphs, remember to remove them for the contact information, title and by lines so that they're properly flush to the left or right or centered

as appropriate. Ditto when you use # to mark a scene change.

There's a first initial in the header because Miller is a very common last name. The reason behind detail headers comes from the inevitable oopsie. Someone carrying a heap of manuscripts might drop or scatter them. It's not worth any busy person's time to read pages in order to match them. Some editors like the additional convenience of the page 2 of 15 format in case the last page or pages are lost. Putting 'The End' at the end of a manuscript is optional. It serves the same purpose as page 15 of 15. There are published stories in the world where the last lines are missing because the last page was gone (and apparently it read fine that way) so it's not just paranoia. Lastly, don't put page numbers on the bottom of pages. That's not where editors will be looking for them.

Color: Black letters on white paper only. If your ink has faded to gray, change the cartridge. If the paper is translucent or yellowed, get better paper.

Standard manuscript formats are for the editor's convenience, but they are not life or death. Use the KISS principle, and request submission guidelines when they're available to discover an editor's personal preferences. Be professional, not groveling (I have to spend three days formatting this or they'll never even read my manuscript, and I must buy expensive paper and laser print this.) Be professional

and not self-righteous (everyone else does it this way, it's Chicago so it must be acceptable, I think sans serif fonts are much more legible so I'll use them instead of Times or Courier.) Most of all, be professional.

Which additionally means:

Don't use email format, such as paragraphs divided by a double return, whether they're single or double-spaced. This is standard for no one in the industry with the exception (there's always an exception) of e-submissions where the manuscript is required to be in the body of the email rather than an attachment. Just because 'everyone is used to it' that doesn't mean an editor wants to see your work in that format.

While you're at it, avoid e-conventions, such as Capitalizing the First Letter in a word to create emphasis, surrounding text by *asterisks* or writing in ALL CAPS. Editors prefer underlining which represents both italics and bold case. Case is specified after you start working with your copy editor. Punctuation and sentence rhythm work nicely to create emphasis as well without resorting to graphics.

Don't try to save space by sneaking in 1.5 line spacing or reducing the font by a point. Editors can see the difference. They also use the white space between the lines for notes. BTW, triple spacing doesn't make it even better and easier to edit and read.

In conclusion, give the editors what they want and expect. They want easy to read copy in a format that they can guess the word count simply by picking up the manuscript. They want convenience and predictability. Format should be as invisible as we can make it, so editors can read your words and enter the world you've written without distractions.

The End