

Manuscript Submission Style
by Sasha Miller

copyright © 2011 Georgia M. Miller

Important Note: This document bears a copyright notice because it is being published. DO NOT place any sort of copyright notice anywhere on any manuscript that is to be submitted to a publisher. To do so is to mark yourself down as a rank amateur.

Your Legal Name
Your Address
Your City, State, Zip
Phone: (555)555-5555
Fax: (555)555-5555
Email: name@service.com

Approximately
?000 words (to
nearest 500)

(Space down approximately to the middle of the page--and don't put this instruction on your ms.! This space is necessary for the editor to use to jot down notes of various sorts concerning what to do with the story when she buys it.)

Title

by Your Name

This is a standard, workable, short story ms. format. Opening line goes as above, where you also start double-spacing. Once upon a time. It really was a dark and stormy night. Suddenly a shot rang out and the butler dropped dead, quite surprised to be the victim for a change.

"Your legal name," above, is the way you want the check made out. The by-line name may be entirely different. Don't worry about editors sorting it out; they do it all the time. Do not put your title in all-capital letters. They must be marked for lower case, and you do not want to give somebody a free excuse to touch your ms. with a writing utensil.

Use a one-inch margin on the top, bottom and sides, and

AuthorLastName

Identifying Word/ page 2

double-space the text. Justify the left margin only. Do not number the first page of a short story, but use a header spaced within the one-inch top margin on the next and subsequent pages:

YourLastName

Identifying Word/Page #

Note that the header is approximately a half inch from the top of the paper so if a photocopy is made, it won't get inadvertently dropped out, and that there are three blank lines between the header and the body copy; this is for clarity's sake and is easy to do by entering the proper codes in the header itself and more on that anon. Use 12-point Courier New, by preference. Please don't use teeny-tiny type unless you are dealing with an editor you never want to sell to.

Some editors get cranky about just what goes just where, but this header format will carry you through most ms. situations. In general, you want to put the most important information--the word that identifies your story, what page--where it is most accessible to the person whipping through the ms., and that's at the top right-hand corner. If the editor wants to know more, such as who has written this wonderful thing he is reading, he will glance over toward the left.

The reason you must maintain the one inch all around is if you gum up the margins, you also gum up the editor's means of calculating word counts (and she doesn't care that your word processor counts words--she has her own methods, thanks). Pica type is preferable, but elite is acceptable. The overwhelming majority of editors want mss. done the old-fashioned way--white

paper, double-spaced 12-pt. non-proportional type. Boring-- but readable. Do not manually double-space! Do not double-space between paragraphs and skip indentation! Do use set up a paragraph style that gives you a half-inch indent at the start of each paragraph! Do use only one side of the paper!

Compose your work however it flows best--quill pens and ink on handmade parchment, ballpoints on old grocery sacks, yellow crayon on newsprint--but be aware that sooner or later you are going to be called upon to type (or re-type) your deathless prose into a computer file. It's the way it works today.

At this point, if not earlier, you get to set up the way it looks. Some programs will give you line-and-a-half spacing; don't even think about it because this is even more difficult to read than single space and trying to figure word count simply infuriates editors and causes them to curse your name. Another sure-fire way to turn an editor against you for life is to use proportional typeface. All the word-count formulae go right out the window. They tell me that this is changing. I resist the change for reasons such as, have you ever tried to carat in a missing letter in a proportionally spaced word? Use clean, white paper and fresh ink in your ribbons if you're still using an impact printer. Black ribbons. If you are using an ink-jet printer, beware of over-inking. Make sure your toner cartridge isn't dying if you use a laser printer.

If you still hand-type, do not use erasable bond; it is slippery and tends to fly all over an editor's office at the slightest provocation. It also smudges badly during the editing

process. I actually did this with my first book. Learned better in a hurry. Most professional writers use plain old copy bond.

Do not send your only copy of anything to anybody! You'd be amazed at how many people commit this blunder, though editors see it all the time.

In your text, don't use capitals for emphasis. And do be sparing of italics or other typographical gim-crackery. Clean, uncluttered text is what you're after. If your word processor can make real italics, please don't do it. This annoys editors and puzzles most typesetters, who are used to seeing italics underlined. This, too, is changing, I'm told, but why take a chance? If, in spite of everything, you have to have a long passage in italics, don't underline the whole thing. Draw a pencil line down the left margin and write "ital" beside it. When you do wish to indicate italics, make the underline connect the words, not interrupt and underline word by word. If you have to jiggle with your word processor for an hour to make it do this, it's good enough for you, she said heartlessly.

Turn off the hyphenation feature. Then you will not break words with hyphens at the end of lines. Also, avoid ending a line with a legitimate hyphen if you can possibly avoid it, such as in the word "mother-in-law", even if your word processor is kind enough to do it for you. Hyphens at the ends of lines also annoy editors who must mark them, and puzzle typesetters, who don't know quite what to do with them. Typesetters don't need any help from you in creating typographical errors.

You might notice the lone line at the bottom or top of some

of the pages in this piece; you should leave these lines, called widows or orphans, in mss. Disable the feature you might have on your word processor that suppresses widow and orphan lines. This will, cumulatively, also gum up word counts by throwing the overall page count off for those editors who reckon the weight by that method.

Here's a quick-and-dirty way to calculate word count. Take the number of characters per average, mid-paragraph line, divide by 6, multiply by number of lines per page, multiply by number of pages, and correct for fraction pages at the beginning and end. This will give you a fairly accurate estimate. Do not take your word processor's count; it will cheat you.

If you have left out a word or a letter in a word and it's too late to re-do the page, insert a carat-mark (^) at the proper place carefully, if, in spite of my stern and cranky warning you are using Times New Roman, and write in the missing item in pencil. You may decide later to correct your correction, you see, and it's easier all around if you do it this way. In these days of computers there is no excuse for sending out a ms. with corrected errors in it unless you are bumping up, hard, against a deadline. There is little excuse for this if you are hand-typing your work. If there is more than one correction per page or more than two per ten pages of ms., you have to re-type it. So stop sniveling, get to it, and resolve to be more careful next time.

You must read your work even though you have run it through the spelling checker, to catch New Age typos--the ones that make real words and won't set off bells. Also, a growing number of

publishers are accepting work electronically these days, and if you rely on someone else to fix your typos, you're in for a rude awakening. As if that weren't enough, you will, at one time or another, encounter somebody in the editorial process who can neither spell nor punctuate. The days of letting somebody else take care of boring little details like this are over.

Scene breaks, as opposed to chapter sections, are indicated by a blank line, number-sign centered, blank line in the body of the text, as follows:

#

This informs editor and typesetter that the extra lines are in there deliberately, and not because you or your word processor had the hiccups.

This writer likes to break chapters of a novel into sections, headed by small Roman numerals. In a short story, however, she uses the simple but elegant arrangement described above.

Now that you are using a computer, you can take the standard spacing of first-page elements, down to the by-line, including the header codes your word processor requires, re-do them to reflect your own name and address, phone number, fax number, etc., and transfer this setup to a permanent template or format file. This presupposes you are using a MS-DOS computer. Many people think MS-DOS is a work of the Devil. Setting this aside, if you are using something else, I simply can't help you beyond telling you what's needed. You have to get there from a different direction.

However, once you have it, save it. You can then call it up whenever you need it, edit it to fit, and carry on.

If you are submitting hard copy, do not use a cover page for a short story. Do not staple the pages; a simple paper clip is useful but not mandatory. Mail it flat and make sure it stays that way as it undergoes the tender mercies of the Post Awful by stiffening the envelope with a piece of cardboard. Cover letters are nice but not required as the editor who receives your ms. can probably guess that you want him to read it. If you enclose a cover letter, do keep it dignified. No groveling, no threats. No fancy hand-done illustrations with cute elves, or glaring paper colors. (As an editor I once got a cover letter on Day-Glo orange paper. No joke. Big headache.) Nowadays, with postal rates being what they are and going up all the time, if you're sending in hard copy it's become standard practice to print out a fresh copy of a ms. rather than to cough up the postage to return it. Your cover letter, if any, can reflect this observation and request the editor to return her comments, either way, in the self-addressed, stamped business-size envelope you have thoughtfully enclosed for that purpose.

As more publishers reluctantly enter the 20th Century (yes, I mean the 20th Century), more are setting the stories they buy from electronic submissions supplied by the author. They will tell you exactly how they want this done, up to and including how many spaces at the ends of sentences.

A word of warning! Never, and I mean never attach an unsolicited submission to an e-mail to an editor! You are going

to gum up that editor's e-mail system with big, useless, most likely inappropriate and/or unwanted files. Keep in mind that these people do talk to one another and they are aware that your submission is just one of many to many editors. They will treat it like spam, and rightly so. Even worse, it is amateur spam.

And as if that weren't enough, if, on the off chance that this ms. is any good, you have just made it several magnitudes of order easier for Internet trolls to bootleg your work.

Now, on to other matters.

Novels, being a different art form, can take a cover page.

Simply use your opening page template, and start your novel with your opening chapter, heading centered, on the next page, at the top, like this:

Chapter One

i

It really was a dark and stormy night. Etc.

#

Note the extra spaces between the chapter header and the small Roman numeral denoting the first scene. This is, to my eye, neater and more attractive than one double space.

It is easier on everybody if you start each new chapter with a new page; place them physically at the top of the page as the extra spaces in the short-story setup are not needed. The extra spaces are used for production notes--type-face, etc., and these notes carry through the entire work.

I identify my novels as NOVELNAME_Mtr.doc. Here, in your master document, you can do a really universal search and replace, spell-check, etc. This is the document you will print from as well. Add or eliminate material as you wish. It all folds in neatly.

If a hard copy is requested by the publishers, do not bind it. This fairly shrieks, "Amateur!" Send it loose, in a box. Some will request both a hard copy and an electronic copy.

Most publishers will supply what is called a style sheet--a list of how they do things. A writer who receives such a style sheet is well advised to follow it slavishly. It creates goodwill with the editor because it saves him time and trouble to convert your ms. from the way you do it to the way they do it.

Anticipating the day you do sell your novel and, by some mischance, you draw a copyeditor who wants to write a book--your book--here's a useful piece of advice this writer received years ago. Get a small rubber stamp bearing the word "STET" and apply it wherever it seems reasonable to do so, in garish purple ink. Much easier--and makes a bigger statement--than hand writing the instruction.

End