

How to Format a Manuscript

[By Holly Lisle](#)

You have two choices with manuscript formatting – you can either format first or format last. I format first – that is, I do the whole novel in exactly the same format in which I will submit it. It uses more paper for print-outs, but I can revise my work easily, and I don't have to mess around with it later – when the words are done, so is the formatting.

Once you've decided **when** you're going to format, however, the next question is... **how?**

I use two formats – one for novels, and one for short work, both fiction and nonfiction. I have never had a complaint about my formatting, I have never had work bounced for formatting, so I know that both of these formats are professionally acceptable. **These are not the only correct manuscript formats out there.** There is, contrary to beginner myth and legend, no one single correct format, nor even one single correct typeface.

I'll give you both formats that I use here, and if you decide to use them, you can rest comfortable in the knowledge that, no matter what else happens, your work will not be rejected by a professional market because of its format. (Unless, of course, your particular market specifies a specific format. I know of no pro markets that do this, though amateur markets seem to be rife with this sort of 'our way or the highway' nit-picking.)

Here are the formats:

Novel:

- **Page Information**
 - **Margins** – 1.5 inches all the way around

- **Font** – Courier, Courier New, or other clean monospace serif font from 10-12 pt. (I use 12 pt. Dark Courier.)
- **Line spacing** – Double-space
- **Paragraph indent** – first line, 5 pt.
- **Header** – right justified, contains the following information: Last name/ TITLE/ page#

A header does not belong on the cover page. Start headers on page one of the actual manuscript.

- Cover page – depends on whether you're agented or not.
 - **Unagented:**
 - **Contact information** – Name and address, phone number and e-mail address in the top left corner of the page, single spaced, left-justified
 - **Title** – centered, just above the middle of the page
 - **by** – centered and one double-spaced line beneath the title
 - **Name or pen name** – centered and one double-spaced line beneath the word **by**
 - **Word count** – centered and rounded to the nearest thousand, one double-spaced line beneath your name or pen name
 - **Agented:**
 - **Title** – centered, just above the middle of the page
 - **by** – centered and one double-spaced line beneath the title
 - **Name or pen name** – centered and one double-spaced line beneath the word **by**
 - **Word count** – centered and rounded to the nearest thousand, one double-spaced line beneath your name or pen name
 - **Agent's contact information** – Name, business name, mailing address, phone number (e-mail

address if you have the agent's okay first), left justified, single spaced, bottom of the page

- First page
 - **Header** – should be in the upper right-hand corner of the page, and page number should be **1**.
 - **Chapter header** – can be anywhere from one to six double-spaced lines down from the top of the page, and can be centered or left justified. You can title your chapters, or just write **Chapter One** or **Chapter 1**.
 - **Body text** – drop down two double-spaced lines to begin your story.
 - **Scene breaks** – drop down two double-spaced lines, insert and center the # character, drop down two more double-spaced lines, and begin your new scene.
 - **Subsequent chapters** – start each chapter on a fresh page. Keep chapter formatting and titling consistent with your first chapter.

Short work

- Page Information
 - **Margins** – 1.5 inches all the way around
 - **Font** – Courier, Courier New, or other clean monospace serif font from 10-12 pt. (I use 12 pt. Dark Courier.)
 - **Line spacing** – Double-space
 - **Paragraph indent** – first line, 5 pt.
 - **Header** – right justified, contains the following information: Last name/ TITLE/ page# **A header does not belong on the title page.** Start headers on page two of the actual manuscript. First labeled page number should be **2**.
- Cover page

- Do not use a cover page with short work, either fiction or non-fiction
- First page
 - **Contact information** – Name and address, phone number and e-mail address in the top left corner of the page, single spaced, left-justified
 - **Word count** – top line, right justified (you'll have to do this with a table if you're working with a word processor), either exact count, or rounded to the nearest ten
 - **Title** – drop down four double-spaced lines, centered
 - **by** – centered and one double-spaced line beneath the title
 - **Name or pen name** – centered and one double-spaced line beneath the word **by**
 - **Body of the story or article** – drop down two lines and begin.
 - **Scene or section breaks** – drop down two double-spaced lines, insert and center the # character, drop down two more double-spaced lines, and begin your new scene.
- Second and subsequent pages
 - **Header** – should be in the upper right-hand corner of the page, and page number should be 2.
 - **Body text** – begins on the first line, doublespaced throughout.

NOTE: I offer a comprehensive introductory class based on my fiction-writing and publishing experience. [It's called *How to Write Flash Fiction that Doesn't SUCK*, and it is no-strings-attached FREE, including a private classroom, downloadable lessons, and a friendly, well-moderated forum where you can work with other students. I hope you'll try it out.](#)