

Standard Manuscript Formats that Editors and Publishers want to see:

1. Use black, 12-point, Times New Roman as the font

Yes, Times New Roman is boring, but it's essentially on every computer ever made.

Don't use a cool font for effect. Save that for your interior design, which comes much later after the editing process.

2. Use the standard page size of 8.5×11 inches and set your margins to 1 inch on all sides

Starting a new document in Word defaults to these parameters, but if you're exporting to Word from your word processor of choice, double-check the output to ensure your page size and margins are correct.

To set page size in Word, go to File>Page Setup and look at the drop-down menu for Page Size.

To set margins in Word, go to Format>Document.

3. Set alignment to left justified

Left justified text is also known as ragged right text. The text will align itself along its left side, leaving its right side nonuniform (unjustified).

To set alignment in Word, select all of your text, then click the left justification icon in the Home tab or select Format>Paragraph and choose "Left" in the Alignment drop-down box.

4. Use a single space after periods

If you were trained to type two spaces after a period, retrain yourself.

In the digital age, use a single space.

Tip: if your manuscript has two spaces after a period, use your word processor's Find and Replace tool. Type two spaces into "Find" and one space into "Replace" then hit "Replace All" with reckless, typing-teacher-be-damned abandon.

5. Use double-spaced line spacing

This may be the greatest help to your editor.

You want to ensure they see your every last word, so give your words room to breathe on the page.

Tip: if you've already written your book with different line spacing, select all of your text in Word, click Format > Paragraph, then select "Double" in the drop-down box under "Line spacing."

6. Indent all paragraphs, but don't hit tab or space to indent

This may be every editor's pet peeve. Setting tabs and hitting tab aren't the same thing.

If you're a tab-hitter or space-space-space-space-spacer, select all of your text in Word, then set indentation using Format > Paragraph. Under "Indentation" and under "Special," choose "First line" from the drop-down menu.

Note: Generally, the first paragraph of any chapter, after a subhead, or following a bulleted or numbered list *isn't* indented in the final product.

7. Format paragraphs according to genre standards

Fiction authors should use indented paragraphs without full paragraph breaks. Nonfiction authors may opt for no indentation so long as paragraphs are separated by a full paragraph break.

Tip: Crack open a book in your genre to see what the paragraphing conventions are, then emulate.

8. Use page breaks

To begin a new chapter, don't just keep hitting return until you create a new page. Rather, use page breaks.

In Word, place the cursor at the end of a chapter, then click "Insert > Break > Page Break" in Word's top menu. Or just use CTRL+ENTER

A section break, on the other hand, is indicated by the pound symbol (or hashtag) on its own line, centered.

9. Number your pages

Don't begin numbering on your title page. Rather, begin numbering on the page your story begins.

To place page numbers in Word, double-click within the header area of the page on which your story begins and click "Insert > Page Numbers," then select your preferred options. Choose to place your page numbers at the top left of the page.

10. Send your manuscript as one Word document (.doc /.docx)

You don't have to compose your masterpiece in Word, but because Word's "Track Changes" feature is still the de facto editing tool of choice, your editor will appreciate receiving a Word file.

Most editors want a single file, in which case, do not send each chapter as a separate file. But it's important to check with both your editor (and, eventually, publisher) on their formatting requirements and expectations.