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# WRITERS RESEARCH REPORT

*Published and Prepared Exclusively for National Writers Assn. Members*

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## THE PROFESSIONAL WAY TO PREPARE A MANUSCRIPT

Revised by Paula Silici

### Research Report NO. 35-8/05

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(Rights Offered) (See body of this report for details)  
Approx. Word Count \_\_\_\_\_

YOUR TITLE GOES HERE

By: John Doe (or Pseudonym)

Proper manuscript preparation is the equivalent of dressing your work for success. You spent hours writing your piece. Take enough time to prepare it so that the editor's first impression is a good one.

Some publishers have their own rules for manuscript presentation. If the publication does not give specific guidelines, use the ones suggested in this research report.

Print your finished product on 8 ½" x 11" white, 20-pound bond paper. Colored paper and fancy typefaces are the mark of a beginner. Use a Courier New or Times New Roman, 12 point font, and print your work on one side of the paper only, making sure the print is dark enough to be read easily. Typewriter- (vs. computer word processor) generated manuscripts are no longer generally preferred. Remember: editors scan

hundreds of manuscripts each week. They're more likely to spend time on yours if it doesn't cause eyestrain.

Set margins at one inch all around, and indent each new paragraph at least five spaces. Use flush left settings. DO NOT justify right margins (they should be jagged, per this example). Indicate breaks in the action (viewpoint or time shifts) with a # # #.

**Double space** the text unless you are submitting poetry. Some publishers prefer that poetry be single spaced, with double spacing between stanzas, while others prefer double spacing throughout, with extra spaces between stanzas. Indent runover lines five spaces.

To set poetry, songs, long quotes or excerpts from another work off from the body of your copy, indent an additional five spaces from each side as shown here. It is not necessary to include extra spaces between the body of the work and the excerpt, but both must be double spaced.

Your name, address, phone number, e-mail address, and fax number should appear in the upper left corner of the first page of a book-length cover sheet or on the first page of an article, short story, or piece of poetry. If you use a pseudonym, place it above your real name with "pseudonym" in parentheses following it. Place your pseudonym in the header on all subsequent pages. At top right, type rights offered. Except for novels whose rights you will negotiate with the publisher upon acceptance, we recommend that you offer First North American Serial Rights on first sale, Second (or Reprint) rights thereafter. Under the rights, type in the approximate word count.

Do not place a copyright symbol anywhere on the manuscript, as the copyright symbol or indication is judged by some editors to be the sign of a beginning writer.

On the first page of articles and short stories, drop 19 lines, then type your title, centered and in capital letters. Type By: on the next line, and your name or pen name following. Drop two lines, indent five spaces, and begin the first paragraph.

Books need a separate title/cover page. Use the same information on the title page of a book at the upper right and left, but omit which rights are being offered. This will be covered in your book contract. Again, drop 19 lines and type the title, centered and in capital letters. Space down two lines, and list the type of novel, i.e., “A Suspense Novel.” (Omit this line for nonfiction books.) Drop two more lines; type By: and type your name or pseudonym.

Do not place a page number on the first page of an article or short story, or on the title page of a book. Begin numbering with “2” on the second page of an article or short story. Number the first page of a book’s first chapter “1” and number consecutively throughout the book. *Do not number chapters individually.*

The second and subsequent pages of books and articles should carry a header, sometimes called a slug. Your last name (or pseudonym) goes on the left side. If your last name is a common one, use your first initial as well. Put the title or a few words from the title in the center, and the page number on the right.

**Each chapter** of a book should begin 19 spaces from the top of the page. Type the chapter title or “Chapter 1” and drop down two lines. Indent the paragraph approximately 5 spaces and begin the chapter. Chapters and title pages should not carry drawings and illustrations unless you are offering illustrations as part of the package.

Charts, diagrams, maps, or illustrations are not placed in the text. Indicate where the insert should be placed in this way:

[Map 3 AFRICA about here]

Package photos, color transparencies, and other illustrations separately from the manuscripts. Include captions with the graphics. A separate caption sheet is usually the best way to present artwork or illustrations.

Books and short stories usually end with THE END or # # #. Magazines and newspapers often use -30-.

Once the manuscript is typed, go over it carefully. A properly formatted, error-free manuscript shows that you take pride in the quality of your work. If possible, have a friend or professional proofreader double check the finished product. Do not rely on computer spell checkers for this final step. If the wrong word has been substituted (such as a faulty homonym) they will not detect it if it is spelled correctly.

Do a word count on the completed manuscript (word processors do this for you) and insert the number where indicated on the first page.

Now you are ready to submit your manuscript. It is acceptable to send a photocopy, if it is a good, clean, easy-to-read copy. ***Never send your only copy of a manuscript.***

***Do not put your manuscript in a cover; do not staple, bind, or clip it together.*** Gluing pages together or inserting a page upside down to see whether the editor has read your manuscript are irritating, unprofessional tricks.

Mail book-length manuscripts in a highly durable box or in a special manuscript carton. Manuscripts of less than four pages may be folded twice, like a business letter, to

fit a No. 10 envelope. Manuscripts of four to eight pages may be folded once and mailed in a 6 ½” by 9” envelope. Any manuscript may be mailed flat, but manuscripts of more than eight pages *must be mailed flat*.

Send a stamped, self-addressed envelope (SASE) with each submission, except when submitting a book manuscript. For books, place stamps and a return mailing label loose inside the book mailing carton, and indicate to the publisher how you wish the manuscript returned (first class, fourth class, UPS, etc.). To insure your manuscript, include a check for the extra handling.

A cover letter, if you include one, should be brief. No cover letter is necessary for short stories. Include your resume or biographical information only if they add credibility to the manuscript. Make sure that your cover letter, your envelopes, and all enclosures reflect the professional image you want the editor to see.