Name ### words

Address Genre [short story or essay]

Phone

Email

Website

If applicable, your agent’s contact info can appear below yours.

THE STANDARD FORMAT FOR ESSAYS AND SHORT STORIES

This is the standard format for American (not Canadian/U.K.) submitted work, according to the *Chicago Manual of Style*, which is the preferred style manual for creative work. I’ve started each short story or essay either 1/4 or 1/3 of the way down the page. I’ve indented all paragraphs at .5 inches, I’ve double-spaced all work, and my font is 12 points, Times New Roman, although you can use Garamond or any normal-seeming serif font. Switching fonts is a rookie move, as is using Courier (these days). Use *italics* for emphasis and titles, not underlining (anymore). There is only one space between a period and the next sentence. Margins are 1” or 1.25” on the sides, 1 inch on the top and bottom. The text is unjustified, with a jagged right edge. I separate all paragraphs with an indent.

Like so. This way, five lines of dialogue don’t eat up the entire page, as they do when you double-space between paragraphs. By the way, with dialogue, generally only one speaker speaks in each paragraph, and you mostly keep the character’s actions in that paragraph. A paragraph break signifies that there is a new speaker. That way, you don’t *always* have to use “he said,” or “she said.”

“Why do we have to format our work this way?”

“Because editors like it.” She took a bite of her sandwich.

“But I’m a rebel,” he said. “I want my story/essay to be different.”

“Great! Do it with your content. And make sure your dialogue punctuation falls inside your quotation marks.” This is incorrect and makes me meshuga: *“Hi”, he said* or *“Hi.” She said*.

Notice the title page and the header: last name/title keywords/page number. You don’t use a header on the first page. If you use the # symbol to separate sections, it’s easier to see where section breaks occur if they happen to coincide with a page break.

#

For paper submissions, only print on one side of the page, and don’t staple. If you email your manuscript, make sure you save it to .doc, .docx, or .pdf format, although your editor will ultimately want a Word document. See how I used serial commas in the last sentence? I hate them, but editors like them.

There are roughly 25 lines and about 250-300 words per page, depending on your formatting. Word counts are as follows:

* + - Long short story: 7.5 – 17.5K words. These are sometimes called a “novelettes,” although I don’t know anyone who actually says that.
    - Short story: usually 2-8K words (3-6K is standard).
    - Flash fiction, flash essay, “short-short” stories: under 2K words.
    - Microfiction, micro-essay: 2-200 words

Notice the end. In lieu of ###, you can also use END. Either way, it’s centered, as is your title information on your cover page. If you’re printing, no weird paper – use 8 ½ by 11 plain white bond. No colored paper or colored text. No origami. Let the work speak for itself, and don’t mess around.

Happy submitting!

###