

## Standard Manuscript Format

- I. Why talk about standard format?
  - A. Nearly three years since the last presentation on the subject (Anne Mini)
  - B. Many new SASP members have joined since then.
    1. Of these, many are just beginning to write or consider publishing what they have written.
    2. Quite possibly, some of these individuals may not be aware of standard format or how to implement it.
      - a. The above was confirmed a few months ago when conversation with a guest attendee revealed that he was unaware of the requirement to double-space manuscripts.
      - b. Many formatting errors and inconsistencies in the latest Author! Author! Great First Page Contest.
- II. What is standard format?
  - A. It is what a professional reader expects to see when evaluating a submitted manuscript, partial submission, or contest entry.
    1. Professional reader - - Agency screener, agent; editorial assistant, editor; literary contest judge, etc.
  - B. All manuscripts should appear the same at first glance.
    1. This allows manuscripts to be judged on the writing and not their outward appearance.
  - C. More than a slight deviation from “standard” can be cause for rejection or disqualification.
    1. A professional reader isn’t going to waste time on an incorrectly formatted manuscript.
      - a. It may indicate other writing problems or that the writer will be difficult to deal with.
      - b. There will be more than enough properly formatted manuscripts to evaluate or judge.
    2. Literary contests often specify unique and somewhat arbitrary rules

designed to help pare the competing entries down to a manageable number.

- D. Regardless of how you plan to be published, it is a good idea to have your work in standard format.
    - 1. It looks professional.
    - 2. You never know when you might need to submit it to someone who would expect to receive it in standard format.
      - a. A copy editor or even a member of a critique group.
  - E. Once familiar with standard format, it's easiest to simply write in it.
    - 1. There is no need to change or convert later, unless a specific agency or other place of submission has specific and different requirements.
- III. How did standard format become standard?
- A. A long time ago, all books were manuscripts. They were *hand written*.
  - B. Copies were made by hand scribing another copy.
  - C. With the invention of moveable type, several copies could be made easily and cheaply.
  - D. The original that the author submitted was still hand written.
    - 1. The legibility of an author's hand writing was certainly a factor in those days.
    - 2. Many of the great writers of the past submitted in handwritten form.
      - a. James Fennimore Cooper, Thomas Hardy, Jane Austen, Herman Melville, etc.
  - E. The typewriter was invented around 140 years ago.
    - 1. Mark Twain is believed to have been the first to submit a typewritten manuscript for publication (*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*)
    - 2. By the time the twentieth century was underway, the typewritten manuscript had become the normal way of submitting one's work.
  - F. Standard Format of today is based largely upon the capabilities and limitations of the typewriter.
    - 1. **Even though it is possible to produce a document with the computer that closely resembles the page of a printed book, a manuscript is not**

**supposed to look like a printed book.**

- 2 Only in a few cases has the capabilities of the computer been taken into account with regards to what is standard.

IV. Conventions of Standard Format

A. Paper

1. Plain, bright white, letter-sized paper of at least 20 # weight.
  - a. Must be easy on the reader's eyes.
  - b. Must stand up to repeated handling, spills, etc.

B. Print.

1. Sharp black lettering
  - a. Again, must be easy to read.

C. Margins and Alignment

1. One Inch Margins on all sides.
  - a. Certain agencies and publishers may prefer or specify other margins, such as one and a quarter or one and a half inches.
  - B, Margins are good places for the reader to put notes.

2. Align Left

- a. Do not "justify." Right hand margin should be ragged.

D. Fonts

1. 12 pt. Times Roman or Times New Roman
  - a. Standard of the industry
  - b. Equates to an Elite (twelve characters per inch) typewriter, even though it is proportional with a computer, compared to non-proportional on a typewriter.
    - i. A typewriter allots the same space on a line to any letter, while a computer adjusts the space according to the letter's actual width.
2. 12 pt. Courier or New Courier
  - a. Also acceptable and the norm for screen writing.
  - b. Equates to a Pica (ten characters per inch) typewriter, and even on a computer is non-proportional.

- i.* Some older sources suggest Courier is preferable because of this factor.
- ii.* Courier allows less text per page and thus may pose problems when allowed a certain number of pages in a submission or contest entry.

E. Paragraphs and Text.

1. Indent the first line by one half inch.
  - a. Standard or default tab setting on most computers.
  - b. Some sources specify five spaces, but with the nature of proportional fonts on the computer, this can be difficult to achieve.
2. DO NOT skip a line between paragraphs.
  - a. A skipped line indicates a scene break.
3. Double-space all lines.
4. Print on one side of the page only.
5. Double-space after all sentence ending punctuation. *Not recommended nowadays. The double space was necessary for emphasis in non-proportional typewriter text, but proportional fonts automatically provide the emphasis. P. L.*

F. Slug line

1. In the upper margin, aligned to the left.
2. Allows for reassembly of manuscript if it is dropped, mixed with others, or otherwise out of order.
3. Contains author's name, title, and page number, separated by slashes.
  - a. Some sources call for slug line to be in all capitals, while others prefer it to be in normal text.
  - b. Do not indent or leave a space between letters and the slashes.
  - c. The first page of the story is page one. Number pages consecutively. Do not start over with the start of a new chapter.

G. The First Page, and the first page of each chapter.

1. Centered on the top line, the chapter number.
  - a. For book length manuscripts, there should be no author contact

information on the first page of text.

- i.* That information goes on the title page (see below).
  - ii.* Short story format does call for contact information to be provided on the first page of the story.
2. Centered on the second line, the chapter title, if desired.
3. Begin one third of the way down the page, or on the eighth double spaced line.
  - a. Indent the first line of the first paragraph, even if many printed books do not do so.
4. At the end of a chapter, leave the remainder of the page blank and start the next chapter on a new page.
  - a. Think of each chapter as a separate computer document, whether or not you create them as such.

#### H. The Title Page.

1. Goes in front of submitted text, whether a complete manuscript or a partial.
2. Two accepted formats. The “professional format” is discussed here.
  - a. Upper right hand corner, the book category/genre and word count.
  - b. Centered left to right and top to bottom, the books title, “by” and the author’s name as it will appear on the cover. (Pen Name)
  - c. Lower right hand corner, the author’s contact information. Here, use the author’s real or legal name.
    - i.* Provide mailing address, phone number and e-mail address.
    - ii.* If an agent is submitting one’s work to an acquisition editor, the agent’s contact information, rather than the author’s will go here.
  - d. Title page should be in the same font and size as the rest of the submission.
    - i.* It is permissible, although not universally accepted to **bold** the book’s title on the title page.

#### I. Word Count

1. Estimated according to the following.
    - a. Times Roman or Times New Roman: two hundred and fifty words per page, times the number of pages.
    - b. Courier or New Courier: two hundred words per page, times the number of pages.
  2. Estimated word count is usually less than according to one's word processing program.
    - a. It is traditional to use the estimated word count unless the individual you are submitting to specifies you are to use the actual count. *Because it's a better representation of the number of pages required. P. L.*
- V. Other bits of useful information.
- A. *Italics.*
    1. With the advent of the computer, use *italics* when needed. It is no longer acceptable to indicate the use of *italics* by underlining.
  - B. Numbers
    1. Write or spell out all numbers less than 100. *Contravenes other standards, but evidently is part of standard format.. P. L.*
      - a. Ninety-nine instead of 99.
      - b. Dates and time are exceptions.
  - C. Other parts of a submission package are usually expected to be in standard format as well.
    1. Synopsis, although I've seen agencies ask that it be single spaced.
    2. Author bio. If it is accompanied by a photo it should be single spaced. The idea is for it to be no more than one page in length.
    3. Query letters or cover letters should follow the basic rules of standard format, other than being single spaced.
  - D. Be sure to check the requirements of the specific agency, publisher, or contest you are submitting to for variations from "standard."
    1. Contests often require the author's name to be removed from the slug line.
    2. Contests and others might require the slug line to be arranged differently.

3. Different margin specifications.
4. Non-standard fonts
5. Actual, rather than estimated word count.
6. Symbols of some kind to indicate a scene break.
7. One space versus two after a period or other sentence ending punctuation.
8. Make the changes and give them what they want!

Naval Adventure/Fantasy  
99,000 words

**Beyond the Ocean's Vast Edge**  
(A Silent Island Sea Story)

By

First Lastname

First A. Lastname  
1234 W. Main Ave.  
Spokane, WA 99001-9999  
(509) 555-1212  
Your name@comcast.net



## Chapter One

### A French Surprise

In February 1801, off the French coast, His Britannic Majesty's Frigate *Theadora* intercepted four French merchantmen attempting to evade the British blockade. After a short chase, and as she prepared to fire a warning shot, the four came about and hove to. The frigate lowered boats and sent one to seize each of the enemy vessels.

The launch, *Theadora's* largest boat, crept steadily towards the waiting barkentine. Edward Pierce, the third lieutenant nudged the tiller to keep the boat on course, making the slight changes in heading without conscious thought or effort.

"A routine operation, do you think, sir?" asked Midshipman Thomas Morgan. His oldest uniform, purchased before a final growth spurt, fit snugly. The midshipman's white collar patches were stained and dirty.

"One would think," answered Pierce. "Still, something about it doesn't set well."

The launch topped a crest and the Frenchman appeared to be noticeably closer. The forty British seamen in the launch would board the apparently surrendered merchantman, place the crew under guard, and search the ship. Once certain that none of the crew was hiding and that the

cargo posed no risk to a prize crew, the majority would return to *Theadora*. Morgan and eight hands would remain onboard with orders to sail to any English port.

“How is that, sir?” questioned Morgan, continuing the conversation.

“Do consider the ease with which we have reached this point,” replied Pierce.

As they drew nearer, Pierce sensed strongly with each passing moment that something wasn't as it should be. He felt uneasy and his suspicions deepened. It gnawed at him, distinct from the nervousness he had when facing danger. He had learned to accept that, although he wished he could face deadly peril with the same nonchalance that everybody else seemed to exhibit. His stomach would knot, he would urgently need to move his bowels, and a seasickness like wave of nausea would wash over him. But it was perfectly normal for him, he recalled. Once action was joined, the symptoms would disappear.

“We sight them after dinner, just into the afternoon watch. Do they panic and flee in separate directions? *Theadora* is but one ship. Surely two or three could escape while we take one or two. Did you observe, Mr. Morgan, their quickness and precision in coming about? No disorder and confusion as expected of undermanned and panicked merchant seamen.”

“Aye, it did have a smart look to it. Many an admiral would be proud, did his fleet maneuver that well.”

“I expected a longer and more intense chase,” said Pierce. “Surely *Theadora* is handier and faster in these seas, but it should have lasted further into the night. Amazingly we caught them in less than four hours!”

As they waited for the English boarding parties, the French crews maintained a rigid sense of order. Sails were constantly trimmed. No one seemed to spend their last moments of freedom raiding the spirit lockers and getting cannon-kissing drunk. Not all merchant crews awaiting capture did that, but it was known to happen. It was strange that they kept their ships in

such perfect order, even if they were sober.

“They did not wait for the warning shot to be fired,” commented the midshipman.

“And the bow chaser cleared away and ready to fire when they hove to. The barkentine lead, but the others swiftly followed. Again, that strangely precise seamanship,” added Pierce.

“Perhaps they want to be taken.”

“Aye, they might be refugees, *émigrés* seeking safety from the guillotine. But why did they run? And now they don't signal or send a boat. They simply wait to be boarded.”

Pierce looked across the water. A hundred yards away, Sollars, the second lieutenant was in the first cutter as it headed toward the second Frenchman. Beyond him, Mr. Forrest, the first lieutenant commanded the second cutter, and Mr. Small, the senior midshipman, the gig, as they pulled toward their assigned prizes

The seamanship haunted Pierce. It hadn't been typical of merchant seamen, French or otherwise. It had been more disciplined, more precise in its execution; like well trained and well led naval crews. French merchantmen sailed by naval crews who were apparently surrendering. But why? Were the French up to something beyond giving themselves up? Or was his imagination playing havoc with the reality of the situation? It would be best to not take chances and be prepared for any ruse the French might offer.

“Mr. Morgan!” Pierce said.

“Aye, sir?” replied the sandy-haired midshipman.

“When we board, your prize crew to cover all access below. No one on deck without permission!”

“Aye aye, sir!”

“Simmons!”