

HOW TO PREPARE A POLISHED SUBMISSION

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Importance of preparing a polished submission

- Creates the impression that you are a skilled and professional writer.
- Makes it easier for an editor or agent to read and handle.
- Suggests familiarity with conventions of the publishing industry.
- Avoids having submission tossed out during an editor's or agent's triage.

I. Substrate and Media Issues

- Editors and agents tend to:
 - (1) read for several hours at a time.
 - (2) carry submissions and manuscripts.
 - (3) keep materials in stacks.
 - (4) select e-mail to read by viewing subject lines.
- Paper Issues
 - (1) Use good quality white 20 lb. paper with decent brightness.
 - (a) Texture.
 - (b) Opacity.
 - (c) Good example: Office Depot's Premium Multipurpose Paper.
 - (2) Do not bind submissions.
 - (a) Hard to stack in a pile, engenders anger when pile slips and falls over.
 - (b) Harder to keep track of place if read in parts.
 - (b) Use smallest suitable binder clip for proposals (*e.g.*, 1/4" mini clips).
 - (c) Use rubber bands for manuscripts.
- E-mail Issues
 - (1) Use an appropriate subject line.
 - (2) Avoid subject lines that can be confused with spam messages such as:
 - (a) Urgent Proposal.
 - (b) Ambition.
 - (c) From Mr. Dodo.
 - (3) Indicate general nature of content in subject line.
 - (a) Query for Romance Novel.
 - (b) Proposal for African History Book
 - (4) Put short submissions such as queries in body of e-mail.
 - (5) Put longer submissions in a single attachment.

II. Readability Issues

- Typography has developed over centuries to maximize ease of reading content.
- Word processing software often apply unattractive conventions by default.
- This gives you a good opportunity to distinguish yourself from most other writers.
- Choice of fonts is critical but simple.
 - (1) Serif fonts are acceptable for any use and essential for body text.
 - (a) Times and Times New Roman are always acceptable.
 - (b) Other good choices are Palatino, Bembo, and Goudy.
 - (2) Sans-serif fonts, if used, should be limited to headers.
 - (a) Arial is commonly used but is a mistake when used for body text.
 - (b) Other sans-serif faces can give a different look, *e.g.*, Avante Garde.
 - (3) Screenwriters need to use Courier because of industry convention.
 - (a) Courier New is a weak unattractive face.
 - (b) Courier 10 BT from Monotype or an ancient HP Laserjet II or III printer are better alternatives.
- Font size is important, use 12 pt. fonts for body text and headers on paper, 10 pt. for e-mail.
- Boldface is fine for headings but do not use for emphasis.
- Use italics when needed for style, generally avoid for emphasis.
- Use double spacing for paper, single spacing for e-mail.
- Use left justification. Full justification is more difficult to read, and, contrary to what some writers think, it does not make your submission look like a book.

III. Style Issues

- Following the rules in the *Chicago Manual of Style* will make your submission appear more professional. Particular areas where writers tend to make style errors are numbers, punctuation (particularly commas and quotation marks), and italics.
- Some common style errors include:
 - (1) Putting periods in the wrong place at the end of a quoted sentence, like this”. The proper way is to put the periods in front of the quotation mark such as it is done here.”
 - (2) When using ordinal numbers, do not put the figure form in superscript. Just type it normally. For example, type the ordinal number “eleventh” as 11th and not as 11th.
 - (3) Using quotation marks or underscoring to describe the name of a book, *e.g.*, “Chicago Manual of Style” or Chicago Manual of Style. The correct way is to use italics, such as *Chicago Manual of Style*.
 - (4) The general rule is that numbers lower than 100 should be spelled out, *e.g.*, one, two, three, . . .
- Use one-inch margins all the way around.
- Indenting looks better when set at 0.25 inches instead of the more common 0.5 inches.
- When double spacing, do not use spaces between paragraphs.
- Use one space between sentences when using proportional-spaced typefaces and two spaces when using monospaced typefaces.

IV. Other Format and Style Issues

- Avoid contractions in general discourse.
- Do not use colored text.
- Do not include images without a good reason.
- Use a proper salutation *e.g.*, Dear Mr. Smith:
- Proofread and spell check.
- Describe the subject of your book in the first paragraph.

V. E-mail Tips

- Do not address a single e-mail message to more than one agent or editor.
- Do not use a pretentious or goofy e-mail name, *e.g.*, “worldscribe.”
- Do not send compressed (zip) files as attachments.
- Do not use e-mail to link to a website.
- All lower case text looks very unprofessional and is difficult to read.
- All uppercase text is very unprofessional and is difficult to read.
- Don’t incorporate images into e-mail message.
- Subject lines should be in proper case and informative.
- Smart quotes are not read by all e-mail software and show up as an incoherent mixture of characters, *e.g.*, “the author’s web site.”
- Avoid coded features such as XML which might get read as “<?xmlnamespace prefix = o ns = “urnschemas-microsoft-comofficeoffice” />.”
- E-mail may not be as formal as a paper submission but avoid saying anything inept such as the real examples below:

“ is complete and polished to the best of my ability.”

“As for genre, I’m not sure just what to pigeon hole it as.”

“Looking for help with my books.Definatly a Agents help.”

“I have not had any formal schooling or training in journalism, or the art of the written word, therefore any faults or corruptions are entirely my own.”

This one is a good read, worthy. I know fiction is having a meltdown, but this one will sell.

Dear Sir/Madam, I apparently require a literary agent.

Conclusion

Prepare the best submission you can but try not to be too obsessive about it.