Kate Eltham
keltham@qwc.asn.au
(07) 3842 9922
c/o Queensland Writers Centre
PO Box 3488
South Brisbane, Qld 4101

498 words

Formatting Your Manuscript

by Kate Eltham

American science fiction author, William Shunn, has said "No one knows for certain how many good stories are passed over because the manuscripts containing them are formatted poorly, but it is certain that a properly formatted manuscript will be more eagerly read by an editor than a poorly formatted one."

Here are some tips for you to ensure your manuscript is well formatted and won't end up in the rejection bin merely because of its physical presentation.

Type your manuscript in black ink on white paper, on only one side of each page. Use standard sized paper (A4) of standard thickness (80gsm). Using coloured paper or inks only calls unfavourable attention to your manuscript. It will also be harder to read.

On your first page, include your full name and contact details in the upper left corner. If you are submitting to a publication where word length may be of concern, it is also advisable to note the total word count of your story. Repeat your name and the title of

your story on every page. This way, if any of your pages come loose from the manuscript, it will be easy to identify them. Be sure to number every page!

Use a standard font, preferably 12 point size, to make your manuscript easy to read. This example uses Times New Roman in 12 point. You can also use `Courier`, which is a `fixed-width font`. Some editors of magazines and anthologies prefer a fixed-width font because it helps them estimate the physical amount of space your story will occupy in the printed publication. Times New Roman and Courier are both *serif* fonts – the letters have little "feet". Don't use a *sans serif* font, such as Arial or Verdana. Those fonts are not as readable for the human eye. Remember, the goal is to make things simple and easy for the people who will make decisions about your manuscript.

The first line of each paragraph should be indented, like this one. Indents help to break up large blocks of text and make it easy to identify where new paragraphs begin. Line spacing is important in a properly formatted manuscript. Ensure you use double line spacing, not 1.5, not single. Double. This is not only readable but gives plenty of space for editors to mark comments on the manuscript. For the same reason, you should use generous margins, at least 3cm on left and right.

Apply left alignment to your paragraphs – the left side is ramrod straight but the right side is ragged. If you justify your paragraphs it will screw up the spacing between words and, again, make the manuscript harder to read. Sensing a theme?

If you follow these guidelines your manuscript will look very similar to this document. Your manuscript will look as though it has been prepared by a competent professional. Most importantly, it will allow your words, not the physical presentation of your manuscript, to attract the proper scrutiny of publishers and editors. Good luck!