**FREE Resource**

# Format a Fiction Manuscript

Submit professionally formatted manuscripts to publishers and agents

| Context: | Use these tips in conjunction with Sandy Vaile's *Manuscript Template* to make formatting your fiction manuscript easy. |
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## Document Settings

Correct document set-up saves editors time, and time is money, so set your Word document with the following settings and they will automatically carry through the entire document (or just use Sandy Vaile's *Manuscript Template*).

| Margins | "Normal", which is 2.54 cm (1 inch) all the way around. |
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| Font | Serif font, e.g. Times New Roman, 12 point size. |
| Line spacing | Double with no spacing before or after the paragraph. |
| Styles pane | The Styles Pane in the toolbar enables you to select pre-formatted font styles.<br><br>Update or create these built-in font styles:<br><br>▪ Chapter title (18 pt, bold, centred)<br><br>▪ Scene title (12 pt, bold, red, left aligned, not indented, see more notes about using this in the General Tips section)<br><br>▪ Normal (12 pt, left aligned, indented 1.25 cm or 0.5 inch)<br><br>▪ Normal new section (12 pt, left aligned, not indented, for the first paragraph of each new chapter or scene)<br><br>▪ Footer (8 pt, left aligned, used for the header and footer)<br><br>▪ Scene break (no indent, centred) |

## Document Layout

| Header | Include the story title (a working title is fine), you full name and page numbers, so that they will appear on every page. (Double click in the header area to enter text.)<br><br>This has the benefit of subliminally reminding the publisher/agent of your name, as well as protecting against lost hardcopy pages. |
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| Cover page | Include the story title, your full name and contact information (phone and email), genre and total word count. |

| New chapter | Always insert a page break before each new chapter, e.g. 'Ctrl Enter' or 'Command. |
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| | Instead, have your cursor right under the last line of text, and hit Crtl + Enter (or Command + Enter on a Mac). That will take you straight to a new page. Enter' then: |
| | ▪ Press 'Enter' six times; |
| | ▪ Select 'Chapter title' from the Styles Pane; and |
| | ▪ Write the chapter title, i.e. Chapter 1. |
| | Your chapter title should appear one third of the way down the page. |
| | **Do not: Press the 'Enter' until you're on a new page because an editor will have to remove each of these unnecessary lines.** |
| Section break | Show section breaks within a chapter, e.g. when the Point of View changes, significant time passes or you move to a different location. |
| | You can do this by: |
| | ▪ Inserting a dinkus (* * * with no blank lines before or after); or |
| | ▪ Leaving a blank line (however, this can become confusing when it lands at the end of a page or you may have accidentally hit 'Enter' too many times). |
| | Each time you start a new chapter/scene/section the first paragraph is NOT indented. |
| | ▪ Select 'Normal new section' from the Styles Pane; and then |
| | ▪ Once you start the next paragraph, select 'Normal'. |

## General Tips

| File naming | Name manuscript files using a reverse date, e.g. *YYYY MM DD Manuscript name*. That way, each time you save a new version, you can be sure that it will sort under the last one, and if you change the manuscript name it won't matter. |
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| Chapter naming | If you decide to name each chapter, still give it a chapter number for easier referencing. Chapter names are not popular with publishers in most genres. |
| Author name | Use your legal name on the manuscript. Once you've secured a contract is the time to worry about using a pen name. |
| Fonts | A serif is a small line attached to the end of each part of a letter, like a foot or hand. |
| | ▪ Typefaces that use serifs are called 'serif' fonts. |
| | ▪ Typefaces that don't use serifs are called 'sans serif' fonts. |
| | **Do not: Use fancy fonts or images, even for chapter titles or section breaks because an editor will have to remove/reformat them.** |
| Chapter end | No dinkus is needed at the end of a chapter, just a page break. |
| Layout | Stick to the standard manuscript format no matter how strange or boring it might look to you. This is what publishers and agents are used to and there are reasons for each choice. |
| | **Do not: Try to make your manuscript look like a real book, i.e. two page spread.** |

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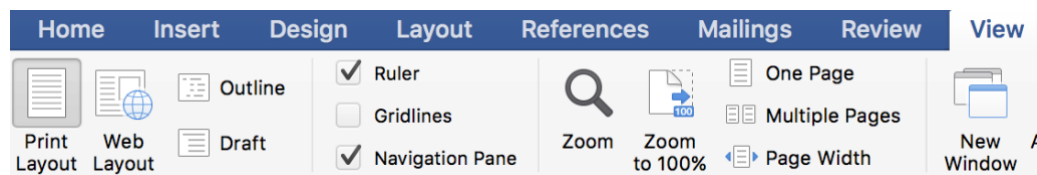
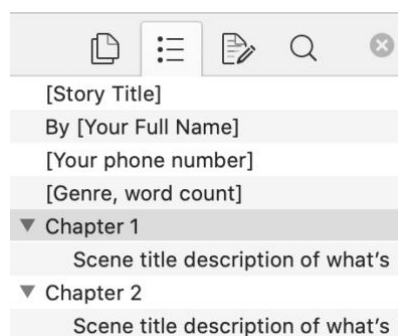| Scene title navigation | This is a nifty little trick to make navigating around a Word document easier. |
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| | ▪ Select the 'Scene Title' in the Styles Pane to create a mini heading for each scene/section. |
| | ▪ Name it anything that will help you remember the main purpose/action in the section, e.g. Best friend goes missing, First kiss, Body found. |
| | **Navigation** |
| | When you want to find information: |
| | ▪ Go into the View tab on the toolbar, and tick 'Navigation Pane' to turn it on. |
| |  |
| | ▪ A new pane will appear on the left side of your document. |
| | ▪ Click on the 'Document Map' icon so it shows all of the headings in the document. |
| |  |
| | ▪ Then you can just click on any heading to move quickly around the manuscript. |
| | **Warning:** **Remember to delete of all these extra headings** *before* **sending the manuscript to a publisher.** |

## Where to next?

If you want to reach your writing potential but need support from an industry professional, Sandy Vaile understands what you're going through and can show you the way to publication.

Need help to polish your whole manuscript or just those first critical chapters?

**Manuscript Critiquing**

**Individual Coaching**

Check out Sandy Vaile's other great resources.

**Online Courses**

**Blog** and **Free Resources**