

Presentation of Work

General

Work must be presented in the best form possible to attract the editor or agent.

Picture the situation in the publisher's office:

- There's a pile of manuscripts to be read and it seems to increase every day.
- The editor has just finished working in the office and is worn out.
- She feels guilty about the 'slush' pile and decides to take a story to assess as she travels home on the tube.
- Which will she choose?
 - The one with teacup stains on the cover?
 - The one which is in a slippery plastic folder?
 - The one with vicious staples protruding?
 - The one with no information on the front page?
 - The one with no space to add comments?
 - The one with dog-eared corners?
 - The one that is closely typed in a small typeface?
 - The one with scrawled handwriting?

OR YOURS?

Specific

Typing

All work **MUST** be typed. It is better to choose a comfortable typeface (font) such as Times New Roman with a size of 12.

All work **MUST** be double-spaced. The editor will not only want to insert comments and changes but will eventually need the space to put typographic instructions. The editor will also be used to reading text in double spacing so will choose that which is immediately ready to be assessed and acted upon.

Do not try and skimp - saving half a page of paper will be a false economy.

Paper

Always use A4 and type on one side only. Make sure all pages are clean and, if a lot of retyping is required, retype the whole page. Some typing corrections will be acceptable but remember the comfort of the editorial reader. Obviously word-processed documents are easier to change.

If you send a document to a second editor after initial rejection make it look as though it is new. Check the contents for any indication that it has been somewhere else - publisher's tea stains are no better than yours.

The paper sizes in the USA are slightly different than European. If submitting work to the USA check on the current practice.

Layout

Apart from double spacing (above) make sure there are ample margins around the text. Michael Legat (p. 100) suggests a minimum of 1 inch at the top and 1 inch on each side and 1½ inches at the bottom. Some authorities might suggest even wide margins all round.

Some also suggest leaving about half a page blank at the beginning of the first page to allow for editorial comment. If you do this with a word processed document, don't panic when you open the document and see a blank screen - all the text is at the bottom of the page and you need to scroll up to see it.

Precede your text with a title page which has your name and address in the top right hand corner, the title and your name or pseudonym in the middle and the approximate number of words at the bottom.

The number of words does not have to be exact as the publisher is interested in the amount of space the story will take up and a half line of blanks at the end of a paragraph takes up as much room as the equivalent in words. Count the words roughly by counting the first hundred words, divide by the number of lines to give a words per line count, count the number of lines on the page and multiply by the number of words then multiply by the number of pages (or buy a word processor and let the machine do it for you).

Your rights

Anything you produce is automatically your copyright unless you have been paid to produce it as part of your employment. That is, text produced at you place of work belongs to your employer.

It will do no harm to add the copyright symbol (©) but it is not really necessary. Generally a first time story has First British Serial Rights attached to it and this is what you are offering. Second rights can be sold to another publisher as long as they know that this is what is being offered. Mark your Title page with FBSR to indicate First British Serial Rights. Never offer all the rights for your story - Arthur C. Clarke had the film '2001' based on a short story written in the late 1940s and then wrote the novel (and the sequel), if all the rights had been signed away with the original story he may have had to live in Britain rather than Sri Lanka.

Submission.

Send a full size A4 stamped self addressed envelope with your document and enclose it in a similar envelope. Do not fold the paper. Your document should be clipped in a convenient way to keep it together. For a short story a normal paper clip is sufficient. You can also add a stamped, self addressed postcard with a message to yourself saying that the document has been received. When the publisher opens the package they might send the card back to you for your peace of mind.

A covering letter can be attached but should be brief and only give salient points. Make this letter as professional as the document, it may be the first thing that is read and influence the final outcome. Include details of your successes in the past but avoid the fact that your Granny thought it was very nice.

Conclusion

Don't wait for this one to come back before you send the next one - juggle as many stories about as possible. Keep a record of where you have sent them and the response to avoid confusion.

Good Luck.

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Hants

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Example Title

By

Keir Livesey Cheetham

FBSR

Approx 1,200 words.

Hit the ground running. Start where the action is and grab the reader's interest. Fill in reasons for running later.

It is important to interest the reader as soon as possible. Don't talk about the rainy day or the flowers unless your name is Du Maurier. Don't forget your first reader is your prospective publisher.

Study the market. There is no point in sending a short story to a magazine that does not publish them. Stories aimed at one market may need to be changed to satisfy another. One magazine may require 1200 words for a surprise-ending story and another 800 - tailor your story accordingly.

The content on the story must also reflect the market. Why not look at the adverts and the letters to see whom the potential readers are? Is a magazine that publishes advertisements for corsets and comfy slippers likely to publish your story about the come-uppance of a football hooligan? Is a science fiction mag going to publish a story about Granddad's pumpkins unless ...?

Enjoy writing. Keep trying. A journey of a thousand miles starts with but a single step. Good luck.