

## **FROM KEYBOARD TO PRINTED PAGE: FACTS YOU NEED TO KNOW**

### **The Form of A Manuscript**

In general, all manuscripts submitted to legitimate publishing houses, whether sent in by agents or submitted directly by you, are read (except those which are handwritten). There is no one proper form that a manuscript should take, except that it should be neatly presented. It is to your advantage to have your manuscript look as professional as possible. You will find the following guidelines helpful when readying a manuscript for submission to editors.

#### *If you use a typewriter:*

- Use a good weight, white paper, 8 ½" by 11".
- Type double-spaced, with no more than 25 lines to the page (except the first page, which is shorter).
- Allow margins of at least 1" on each side of the paper.
- Neatness is of the essence; retype pages with strike-overs, and include as few erasures as possible.
- Always keep a carbon or clean photocopy of every manuscript that you submit to an editor.
- Number each page consecutively in the upper right-hand corner, with the exception of the first page which is not numbered.
- Include in the upper left-hand corner of every page (with the exception of the first page) your last name and a key word from the title.

#### *If you use a computer:*

- Paper, spacing, margins, and form are the same as for the typewritten page.
- Select an easy-to-read style of type such as Arial or Times New Roman. Avoid elaborate or script-type styles.
- Dot-matrix is the least desirable type of printer; some publishers refuse to read manuscripts submitted in dot-matrix print because it is difficult to read. Laser and inkjet printers are preferred. In all cases, be sure the ink is dark enough.
- For continuous feed printers, use laser edge paper that tears smoothly. If you use a tractor feed printer to print your manuscripts, tear off the holes on the sides, and tear the pages apart. Do not send a disk or cd unless an editor requests one.
- Keep one hard copy and one electronic file.

The format of the first page **MIGHT** look something like this:

Your Name  
 Your Address  
 City, State Zip code  
 Your Telephone Number  
 Your Email Address

TITLE ALL IN CAPS (½-way down page)

By Your Name

Your story begins here (¾-way down page).

### Number of Manuscript Pages

While there are *no specific requirements* (nor should there be) for any kind of book, a survey of published SCBWI members indicated ranges of manuscript pages that are suitable, and saleable, for particular genres. Taking into consideration that your main character has the greatest influence on how your manuscript will be viewed (i.e. if your main character is a chipmunk, it is not likely that your manuscript will be suitable for young adults), and remembering that there are exceptions to every rule, the following table includes the number of manuscript pages per genre most often cited by the survey respondents. We've added sample titles exemplary of their genres, but, again, the books are not indicative of any absolute.

**Keep in mind that what editors seek are GOOD MANUSCRIPTS!** It is they who will decide what genre best defines your book. For additional titles, please refer to the children's section of your local bookstore.

Genre	# of Pages	Sample Title(s)
Board Book	½ - 1	
Picture Book	2 - 3	<i>Goodnight Moon, The Polar Express</i>
Picture Story Book	6 - 9	<i>The Paper Dragon</i>
Easy-Reader Book	10 - 20	<i>Nate the Great</i> by Marjorie Sharmat
Middle-Grade Fiction	40 - 60	Sid Fleischman's <i>McBroom</i> series
Young Adult (YA) Novels	175 - 200	<i>Speak</i> by Laurie Halse Anderson
Young Nonfiction	10 - 20	
Middle-Grade Nonfiction	60 - 100	Books by Russell Freedman
YA Nonfiction	100 - 150	
Poetry for younger readers*	15 - 40	Books by Shel Silverstein
Poetry for older readers*	50 - 150	

*\*In manuscript form, one poem per page.*

## Submitting the Manuscript

Before sending your manuscript to an editor, you need to determine which publishing houses publish the kind of material you are submitting. A careful investigation of publishers' catalogues (available by request from the publisher), *Children's Books in Print* (available in the library), various marketing lists found in writers' periodicals, and, most importantly, examination of books themselves, should indicate to you which publishing houses would be most receptive to your work.

- Manuscripts should be addressed to an editor in the juvenile department. The names of editors are listed in *Literary Market Place* (available in the library), some writers' periodicals, and the SCBWI "Publishers of Books for Young People" (or "Market Survey"). **Always** include a self-addressed, stamped envelope of the correct size to hold your manuscript, with a sufficient amount of postage affixed.
- It is advisable to include a brief cover letter. Include only information which is necessary for the editor to know, as it relates to your manuscript (e.g., for nonfiction, describe what qualifies you to discuss your subject; for fiction, include any previous publishing credits). If you are submitting your manuscript in response to a previous query, be sure to mention this in your cover letter. The cover letter should never attempt to explain the story; your story must speak for itself.
- Keep copies of all correspondence.
- Unless you are a professional illustrator, we do not recommend including illustrations with your manuscript; an art director, designer or editor will choose a trusted illustrator she thinks suits your work.
- Do not attempt to indicate where you would like illustrations to be placed in your story, or what they should portray. This is the province of the art director and/or designer and the illustrator.
- Some editors will send you a letter or postcard acknowledging receipt of your manuscript, but others will not. To encourage notification, you may wish to include a self-addressed, stamped envelope or postcard with your manuscript.
- A decision on your manuscript may take three months or more. Some editors are slower to respond than others. Always submit a *copy* of your manuscript; never send your original. If you have not had a response at the end of two months, send a polite letter of enquiry to the editor and ask about the status of your manuscript. If you have not received a response at the end of the three months, write to the editor again, withdrawing your manuscript from consideration. Then submit another copy elsewhere. You may or may not get your first submitted copy back, but you need not worry; no publisher will use it without your knowledge and permission.
- Submitting a manuscript to several editors at the same time (a policy called "multiple submissions") is sometimes frowned upon by editors. Most editors, however, recognize that waiting many months is very difficult and that people will multiply-submit their work. A good way to proceed is to submit a manuscript to one publisher as an exclusive submission. If after three months you have not heard anything, notify the publisher that the manuscript may still be considered by them, but that you are submitting it elsewhere—and begin your multiple submissions at that time.

## Query Letters\*

It is generally a good idea to query an editor before submitting nonfiction material, or novel-length fiction. Query letters should include your subject matter, the age group for which you intend it, and the reason that your book will be different from competing books on the subject already in existence. (Research on competing books is best begun by consulting the *Subject Guide to Children's Books in Print*, and then examining those books.) Many juvenile book editors wish to be sent a query before submitting novel-length fiction material, while some editors will wish to see an outline or synopsis and a chapter or two as

well. It is also possible that an editor would like to be queried first before receiving your picture book manuscript. **Always research and adhere to a publisher's submission policy**, and include a stamped, self-addressed return envelope with all correspondence.

### **Responding to Editorial Notes/letters**

The intention of a penned note, on a form rejection or personal letter, from an editor, is to let the writer know that the editor is interested in the writer's work. If there is a penned note on a rejection (i.e. "Try us again"), the proper response is a short, polite letter thanking the editor for her interest, and expressing your hope that a new manuscript from you will better suit her needs. If you have a new manuscript that is appropriate for the publisher, send it along with the letter.

If you have received a personal letter, detailing some revision suggestions, but not promising a contract, the proper response is a letter to the editor thanking her for the time and interest given to your manuscript. Then consider the editor's suggestions carefully. If you decide that your manuscript would indeed be improved by those revisions and do them, you are professionally obligated to send that manuscript back to that editor. No editor spends time writing a detailed editorial letter without expecting to see the manuscript again. Mention in the letter accompanying your revised manuscript, that you have followed the editor's suggestions for revisions. If you decide not to revise the manuscript as suggested, do not plan to send it back to that editor. Send it elsewhere.

### **Agents**

Many writers of both adult and juvenile books do not choose to be represented by an agent. An agent is not necessary to sell a saleable manuscript. However, if you wish to be represented by an agent, these are some things you should know:

- Not all agents handle juvenile material. The "Agents Directory" on page 54 lists some who do.
- Often, it is difficult to get an agent if you have not made previous sales on your own.
- As with editors, agents should first be sent a query letter, before they receive your manuscript.
- A stamped, self-addressed envelope must likewise be included.
- The SCBWI recommends that you be cautious when dealing with agents who charge fees for any of their services.

### **Subsidy Publishers**

Publishers who charge you for publication of your work (subsidy or vanity publishers) should be avoided completely.

### **Magazines**

Submitting manuscripts to juvenile magazines is in some ways different from submitting to book publishers. Some of these differences are:

- The first page of a manuscript should include in the upper right-hand corner the approximate word count (rounded off to the nearest ten).
- Magazine publishers generally do not acknowledge receipt of manuscripts.
- It is appropriate to enquire about your manuscript after two months have elapsed.
- Some magazines, especially in the religious field, will accept multiple submissions.
- Most agents will not handle magazine sales.
- Magazines plan issues far in advance; it is important to keep this in mind when submitting seasonal material.

- Some magazines pay on publication. They may hold your manuscript for a considerable length of time before either printing or returning it. The SCBWI recommends that magazines that pay on publication be placed on the bottom of your list of possible publishers of your work.
- Most juvenile magazines do not pay large amounts for their material, but can provide the novice writer with invaluable experience.