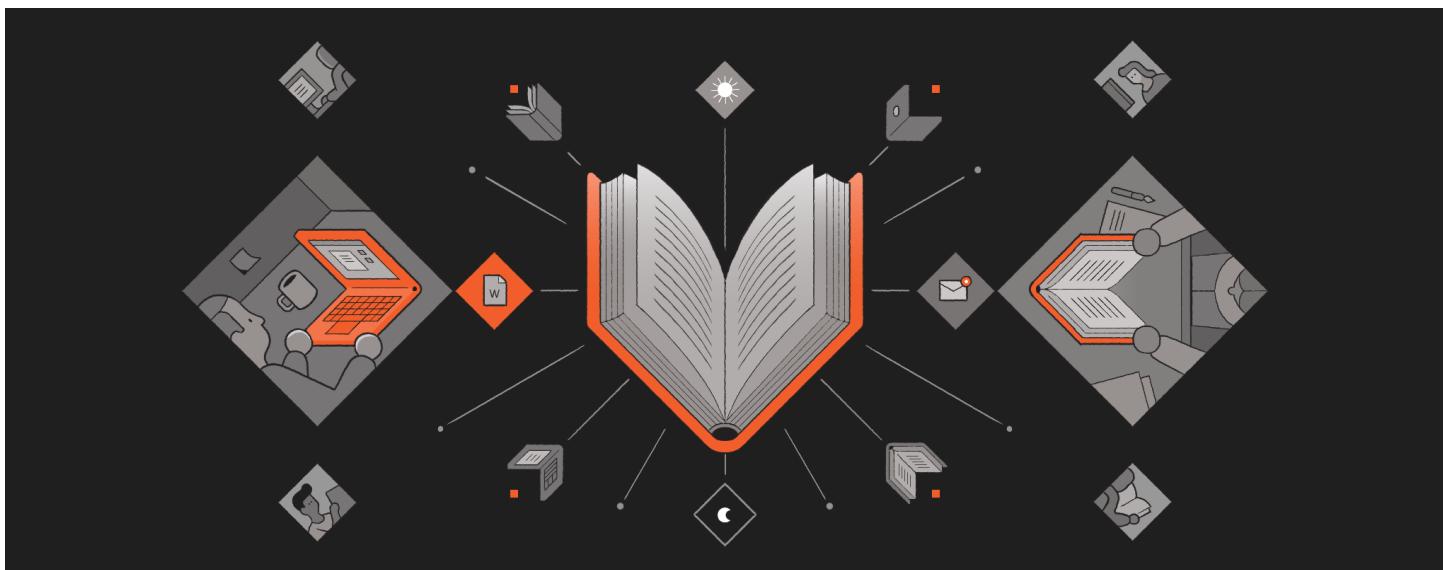# The Black List

Uploading and Formatting Guide for Fiction

Writers who are new to fiction or have pursued the craft outside of industry centers like New York may be unaware that there are established industry standards for manuscript formatting. Authors should adhere to the standards listed in this guide, as they follow general expectations in the publishing industry.
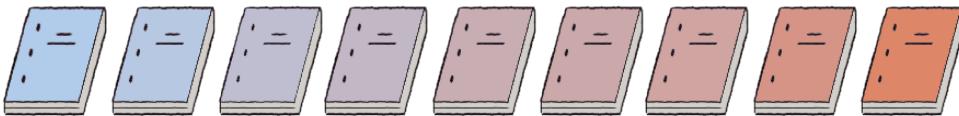
While Black List readers will not primarily focus on formatting in their evaluations, The Black List can only host and evaluate manuscripts that are properly formatted. When a manuscript does not meet industry standards for formatting, admins at The Black List will remove it from the site until the writer can revise their material to meet the current industry standard.

Please use this guide to ensure that your work follow industry standards.

Contents

Uploading Guidelines

All manuscripts need to be uploaded to blcklst.com in **two separate files**, regardless of your intent to purchase an evaluation or opt into a program. Both files must come from the same project–you cannot upload the first 90-100 pages of one project and upload the full manuscript of another. Additionally, both the 90-100 page file and full manuscript file must be uploaded to the site at the same time. You will not be able to upload the first 90-100 pages of your manuscript one day and then upload the full project at a later date. Please do not submit any incomplete manuscripts, as they will be flagged by The Black List team and taken down.

Upload #1: The first 90-100 pages

The Black List requires all fiction writers to upload the first 90-100 pages of their manuscript as a separate file. Please do not select a random excerpt of 90-100 pages from any other section of your manuscript–it will be flagged and removed. **All writers must upload the first 90-100 pages of their manuscript, even if they do not expect to purchase an evaluation.**

If you choose to purchase an evaluation, your assigned reader will evaluate these first 90-100 pages. Please note that any manuscript submission to a Black List program or partnership must have received (or be in the process of receiving) at least one evaluation.

Upload #2: The entire novel

In addition to the first 90-100 pages, all fiction writers are required to upload their full novel-length manuscript as a separate file. This second file will not be read and evaluated by any Black List readers. We just ask that writers upload their complete novel for the assurance of any industry professionals since, unlike nonfiction, the fiction publishing industry prefers to consider completed manuscripts over works-in-progress. See for more information on word count for entire manuscripts.

Title Page

Title pages are straightforward. Just make sure to use Times New Roman 12 pt font, as it is the industry standard. Refer to the figure below for refrence on what needs to be included on a title page and how it should be formatted. Please note that word and page count should reflect each upload (i.e., the word and page count for the upload of first 90-100 pages will not be the same as the full manuscript).

If you do not have an agent, please just include your name, email address, and phone number. We understand that many emerging writers do not have literary agents, and this will in no way affect how your work is read and evaluated.

[Author Blawverly]   Word count: 25,000
[Writer's Email]   Page count: 97
Agent: Early New Kidd Sr.
Early New Kidd Sr. Agency
Phone: 200-2XX-00XX
[Agent's email address]

CHAMPIONSHIPS, BIRDS, & OTHER THINGS UNREACHABLE
by: [Author Blawverly]

Proper Formatting

Your manuscript should look professional and follow industry standards. Please look below for everything you need to know about formatting. Any manuscript that does not follow these formatting guidelines will be taken down and returned to its author for revision.

Font: Times New Roman 12 pt

Any manuscript that uses a font other than Times New Roman and/or a size other than 12 pt will be sent back to its author for revision. Please note that your title page should also follow these font guidelines.

Page Size: 8.5" x 11"

The Black List is a U.S.-based company, so we require all manuscripts to be submitted in standard Letter-size (ANSI A) pages.

Margins: 1"

We only accept manuscripts with 1" margins. Do not attempt to make margins smaller to include more text in your 90-100 page excerpt–we will notice and return it to you for revision.

Line Spacing: Double spacing

All manuscripts should use double spacing, as it is more legible to readers. Any manuscripts that use single or 1.5 spacing will be returned to its author for revision. Once again, do not attempt to fit more text into your 90-100 page excerpt by changing the line spacing. It's not sneaky.

Page Breaks: Each chapter

There should be a page break at the end of each chapter. For example, the end of Chapter One and beginning of Chapter Two should be on two separate pages.

Proper Formatting, cont.

Indentations: Each paragraph

Each paragraph should begin with a half-inch indentation. You can use your "Tab" key on your preferred word processing program to properly indent.

Reference: Page and chapter numbers

Page and chapter numbers should be used throughout your manuscript. The Black List requires that each page have a number in either the header or footer of your document. Additionally, each chapter needs to have a corresponding number for reader reference. Please number your chapters even if you have given each chapter a specific name, i.e. title your first chapter "Chapter 1: The Beginning" instead of just "The Beginning."

Footer and Header: Page numbers and last name

As stated above, please include your page numbers in either the header or footer of each page of your document. No matter where you place it, please remember to include your last name next to the page number.

Need more help with formatting?

There are many apps that authors can use to make sure that their work looks professional and industry-ready. The writing software Scrivener, for example, allows users to write in their favorite font and preferred margins, and then export a PDF of their work to specific submission guidelines. Authors are more than welcome to use a program like Google Docs or Microsoft Word to write their manuscripts–we just ask that you pay special attention to changing the default settings to match The Black List's formatting requirements.

Formatting Example

Chapter One

In the ancient city of London, on a certain autumn day in the second quarter of the sixteenth century, a boy was born to a poor family of the name of Canty, who did not want him. On the same day another English child was born to a rich family of the name of Tudor, who did want him. All England wanted him too. England had so longed for him, and hoped for him, and prayed God for him, that, now that he was really come, the people went nearly mad for joy. Mere acquaintances hugged and kissed each other and cried. Everybody took a holiday, and high and low, rich and poor, feasted and danced and sang, and got very mellow; and they kept this up for days and nights together. By day, London was a sight to see, with gay banners waving from every balcony and housetop, and splendid pageants marching along. By night, it was again a sight to see, with its great bonfires at every corner, and its troops of revellers making merry around them. There was no talk in all England but of the new baby, Edward Tudor, Prince of Wales, who lay lapped in silks and satins, unconscious of all this fuss, and not knowing that great lords and ladies were tending him and watching over him—and not caring, either. But there was no talk about the other baby, Tom Canty, lapped in his poor rags, except among the family of paupers whom he had just come to trouble with his presence.

Formatting Example, cont.

Chapter Two

Let us skip a number of years.

London was fifteen hundred years old, and was a great town—for that day. It had a hundred thousand inhabitants—some think double as many. The streets were very narrow, and crooked, and dirty, especially in the part where Tom Canty lived, which was not far from London Bridge. The houses were of wood, with the second story projecting over the first, and the third sticking its elbows out beyond the second. The higher the houses grew, the broader they grew. They were skeletons of strong criss-cross beams, with solid material between, coated with plaster. The beams were painted red or blue or black, according to the owner's taste, and this gave the houses a very picturesque look. The windows were small, glazed with little diamond-shaped panes, and they opened outward, on hinges, like doors.

The house which Tom's father lived in was up a foul little pocket called Offal Court, out of Pudding Lane. It was small, decayed, and rickety, but it was packed full of wretchedly poor families. Canty's tribe occupied a room on the third floor. The mother and father had a sort of bedstead in the corner; but Tom, his grandmother, and his two sisters, Bet and Nan, were not restricted—they had all the floor to themselves, and might sleep where they chose. There were the remains of a blanket or two, and some bundles of ancient and dirty straw, but these could not rightly be called beds, for they were not organised; they were kicked into a general pile, mornings, and selections made from the mass at night, for service.

Bet and Nan were fifteen years old—twins. They were good-hearted girls, unclean, clothed in rags, and profoundly ignorant. Their mother was like them. But the father and the grandmother were a couple of fiends. They got drunk whenever they could; then they fought each other or anybody else who came in the way; they cursed and swore always, drunk or sober;

Proofreading

A simple spell check is not sufficient for proofreading a manuscript, although it is a good place to start. The issue is that many writers will simply use the wrong words while spelling them correctly, such as "collage" vs. "college" and the old standbys "your/you're" and "their/there/they're." Many programs such as Grammarly help find these kinds of errors and fix them. We recommend downloading such a program for all professional writing work.

Spelling errors, missing or incorrect words, and poor punctuation can devalue a writer's project before it even has a chance to grab a reader's attention. A harrowing death scene loses its intensity in a heartbeat with poor spelling or a misplaced exclamation point.

> It is a truth univerasally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wire.
>
> Jane Austin, *Pride and PRejucie*

Elements like character name changes can also become a major issue if not caught in the proofreading stage–they may confuse the reader, and ultimately, distract from the reader's overall impression of the manuscript.

In addition to a spell check, submitting writers should have a friend, family member, or colleague with some experience in editing look over their work and ensure that everything is perfect. It may be difficult for a writer to remain objective when proofreading their own work, as they already know the content and flow of words, so it's always wise to bring in fresh eyes.

We strongly recommend that all writers get an outsider to take a critical eye to their work before they invest in an evaluation or submission. Reading your work out loud can also be a great way to catch elusive errors–even established writers like Aaron Sorkin recommend this method of proofreading and revision.

Word Count

Publishing standards for word count depend on the intended audience for the manuscript.

Based on The Black List's double-spacing formatting requirement for Fiction (see page 4) the page count for a full manuscript of adult fiction will range between 240 pages (60,000 words) and 880 pages (220,000 words). **No adult fiction manuscript longer than 880 pages will be permitted on blcklst.com.**

The range for full manuscripts in Young Adult fiction will range between 240 pages (60,000 words) and 360 pages (90,000 words). **No YA manuscript longer than 360 pages will be permitted on blcklst.com.**

The range for full manuscripts in Middle Grade fiction will range between 120 pages (30,000 words) and 220 pages (55,000 words). **No Middle Grade manuscript longer than 220 pages will be permitted on blcklst.com.**

Additional Resources

Want more?

Here are some additional resources on how to format your manuscript to align with the publishing industry's standards:

- MasterClass - "How to Format a Book Manuscript"
- Jane Friedman - "How to Format Your Manuscript for a Designer or Publisher"
- Jericho Writers - "How to Present a Manuscript"

Happy writing!