
Six Great Ways
to Prepare
Your Manuscript
for Publication

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Introduction

Allow me to let you into an industry secret.

Publishers rate really well-prepared submissions.

This may seem obvious, but those that aren't can result in a failed pitch – and disappointment.

The truly nightmare script is an extreme (and rare) scenario, but you'd be surprised at the number of authors who overlook the most important tasks of writing: checking the text, how it reads, and preparing their files well.

Here's the inside track on how to get your script into great shape – and if you're planning to pitch a publisher, make them love you and want to bring your literary baby into the world!

(These points also apply if you're self-publishing.)

1. Read it aloud

This might seem counter-intuitive: I'm writing this book, not speaking it, right?

Reading your script aloud, somewhere quiet and undisturbed, is a handy way to shift from the writing mindset to the reader experience.

It's also a useful tool to check grammar and flow:

- Does the text read well?
- Does the punctuation reflect pauses in the right places?
- Is the paragraphing and sentence structure sound?

Voice is important too. There's a popular misconception in non-fiction that writing must be stiff or formal to get into print.

On the contrary: often a more informal, even conversational, style authentic to its author has better impact and reach.

If you're writing instructional content, a how-to book or even a memoir or biography – your voice should rightfully be unique, because it's who you are and how you express yourself.

But your tone will need to be compatible with the genre – especially if you're writing to a commission.

Reading aloud gives you a clear window into how your readers will be sitting down to your words.

2. Be journalistic

This is a non-negotiable when writing for publication. After you've written your first draft, be sure to go through your piece and fact-check everything.

It doesn't matter whether you're writing an article, book or story: if you're citing facts and figures, naming real people, places, dates or events, solid journalism applies.

As an author you really don't want to be saddled with the public embarrassment that comes from infelicities. Getting these right will save you from potential headaches.

The five classic pillars of journalism are what, where, why, when and how. If you cover them, you can rest easy – your content will be sound.

3. Check the publisher's requirements

If you're writing (or planning to write) for a specific publisher, do check their manuscript guidelines or notes to authors before you make a start.

This can vary from fundamentals on file formatting, to their preferred submission method and information to include.

Publisher guidelines are usually available to download from their website. (If not, it's fine to get in touch and ask for a copy.)

It's useful to be aware that publishers are lean operations: they don't have the levels of staff or time to burn the midnight oil dealing with non-conforming manuscripts.

If your files aren't readable, or they feel too much work is involved to pull your submission into shape, what's likely to happen is a kind, but firm rejection slip. They may also include notes on how to resubmit, if they're interested in your pitch.

Guidelines are there for a reason – observing them shows you're a responsive and willing collaborator. Whether you're writing fiction, non-fiction or anything else – not conforming to the basics can jeopardise your chances of being published.

It's simply easier to make nice and give the publisher what they're asking for.

4. Reference well

If you're writing in a specific sector or genre and need to include citations or references in your book, it's a good idea to look at the style guide the publisher

prefers. Some style guides are appropriate to different subject areas.

For example, fiction writing often follows the *Chicago Manual of Style*; whereas non-fiction, academic or research writing could follow any one of several style guides (short form, Harvard, APA, Vancouver, *The Economist*… the list goes on!).

Alternatively, you can discuss with the publisher in advance which system you'd like to use (or select one you like, if you're self-publishing).

Some publishers are happy to use the style you've chosen for your manuscript, provided it's applied consistently; while others require your text to conform to their house style.

For example, if your publisher prefers Harvard style, you will need to submit in Harvard. If you format references in another style, it can create headaches.

It's far easier for authors to work with an agreed style as they go along, than it is for a publisher to have to completely rework an unsuitable one. In book manuscripts with lots of references, no doubt you'll appreciate just how much work (and cost) having to change an entire citation system actually creates.

Finally – and I know this is incredibly obvious, but it's also important! – if you're citing anything, do go through your script and double-check them.

> Imagine a piece with 250 references.
>
> One-third of them are missing from the text. Another third are missing from the bibliography.
>
> A good few of the other third can't make up their mind whether they were published in 1748, 1828 or 2008.

Believe me when I say publishers have seen – and had to work with – many scripts in this parlous state.

Please don't let yours be one of them!

Be completist, and don't expect your readers to go find the information, because solid referencing is considered fundamental for publication. (Publishers look at this too, because it shows good attention to detail.)

5. Get a language read

If English isn't your first language and you feel you might need some support in this area, it's a good idea to get a first-language speaker to review your piece, even if you have to pay for it.

If you feel your submission needs more targeted help, it's best to work with a copy-editor.

Copy-editing focuses on grammar, typos, consistency and readability; while line editing is more involved, working on writing style and narrative flow – crafting the text.

Not only will you stand a better chance of being published, but your content will benefit from good clarity and not being lost in translation: an absolute must.

6. Use the right program – and don't 'design' your script

Here's another myth-buster: your manuscript doesn't have to look 'polished'.

The standard industry program for text processing is Word. If you're using Scrivener or other writing assistance and organisational software, your content will need to be exported into Word so that publishing professionals can work with it effectively.

Similarly, presenting a beautifully finished and laid out file raises technical issues, because all those fancy fonts, headers, footers, anchored boxes, colours, shading and anything else need to be stripped out for editing and design purposes.

Even a well-intentioned table of contents numbered to the page in Word isn't useful.

Page numbering, design and layout in Word do not translate directly to InDesign (the most common program for designers to typeset and format), or the final printed page or ebook.

The good news is that you don't need to waste time and effort making your script file look pretty. It's fine to keep it simple: just use words and spaces!

Here are some essential dos and don'ts:

- Don't hit the return key repeatedly to get to a new page – hit *Ctrl* + *Enter*
- Don't use the space bar for new paragraphs: use the *Indent* facility
- Do use the *Table* facility rather than tabs
- Don't double space after a full stop (yes, debate continues to rage over this, but modern wordprocessing and typesetting aren't typewriting. Every publication – and publisher – these days removes double spacing)
- Do run a spellcheck in Word
- Don't consider writing programs such as Grammarly and Hemingway 'the law'. They're helpful to weed out basic issues, but only artificial intelligence: they operate via algorithms and can deliver odd suggestions –

even false positives. Artificial intelligence is no substitute for good, knowledgeable and experienced human editing!

If you're happy and confident with Word, fantastic – by all means use it to the best of your ability (for example, by applying Word Styles for headings). If not, don't worry: it's fine not to complicate things!

If you've found the advice in this booklet useful and would like more information or assistance with your project, contact me:



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