

The Book Edit:

Professional presentation of novel manuscripts to agents: some advice

Target your submission

Use *The Writers and Artists Yearbook*, search online and/or follow agents on social media to find out more about who they are and which writers they represent. Are they the sort of writers you like/ feel you might be similar to? Do the agents accept unsolicited manuscripts? Does their agency have any new agents who are actively seeking clients for their list?

Present yourself as a professional

Make sure your submission to an agent has the following:

1. a covering letter —very brief—which says something about your book (what's unusual about it, if it fits into a particular genre or tradition etc), and something about you: any publications you may have had, courses, anything that marks you out as someone who's serious about a writing career.
2. the first three chapters of your novel.
3. a brief synopsis (500 words or 2 pages maximum).

Formatting your MS

To give yourself the best chance of success, it's important to ensure your MS looks as polished as possible. Here are some tips to achieve this:

- Create your MS in Word with standard 1 inch margins on all sides
- Use Times New Roman, 12pt, black font
- Align text to the left-hand side
- Double space the entire document

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- Indent each new paragraph except for the first line of a chapter, or after a deliberate section break
- Indent each new line of dialogue to differentiate between speakers
- Create a header for each page with your surname and book title
- Ensure every page is numbered, starting with the first page on chapter one
- Use page breaks between chapters so they don't run on
- Be consistent with your speech marks. In UK publishing, single speech marks are most commonly used for dialogue
- Make sure your punctuation goes inside speech marks for dialogue, e.g. 'Be quiet!' he said.
- Only use one space after punctuation
- Create a separate title page with your name and address in top right corner, recipient's name and address in top left corner, title of story in middle, and number of words at bottom
- A note on Copyright: as an author of any work of fiction, you are responsible for acquiring permission to quote from a work in copyright. This includes song lyrics, but exclude song titles
- For more on formatting, *The Creative Writing Coursebook* (edited by Julia Bell and Paul Magrs) has an excellent section by Penny Rendall (pp342-369) on how to lay out your MS.
- For more on all matters of style, grammar and punctuation, we strongly advise you consult the masters, Strunk and White in *The Elements of Style* (available free online [here](#)).