Things Authors Should Do: A List

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1. Proper manuscript format. People blow this off all the time, but it is extremely important. It is important not just to the editor/agent to whom you submit, but to the people who are going to work on your manuscript once it's purchased and in production. Editors who want a format that is not the traditional proper ms. format will specify what format they want; with no specification, use this: **1" margins all around, double spaced, 12 point Courier New typeface.**

2. Do not put images in your manuscript. You might think it's cute to put a heart at the beginning of each chapter, or insert an image of a star everywhere you have a scene change, but it is not. It's just annoying for everyone who looks at your manuscript and has to do anything technical with it. (If you have a specific request for the type design—for example, if you want the published book to have a heart at the beginning of each chapter—that is something to let your editor know once the book is finished and going into production.)

3. In the header, put your full name, the title of your manuscript, and the page number. In your footer, put the page number. Page numbers should be on the right hand side of the page always; that is where publishing people automatically look for them.

4. Make a reference guide. This will be handy for yourself, your editor, and everyone involved in the production process. Kat and I, despite knowing we should do this, did not. This resulted in our bad copyedit being even *worse*, and made us feel totally stupid. So after we spent many hours wrestling our copyedit into submission (and scrawling STET—meaning "keep as originally written"—on everything), we wrote a letter to the proofreader, which you can read at the end of this article.

Your reference guide should include:

- A list of the names of main characters and any nicknames used in the story (with their correct spellings!)

- Brief character descriptions and notes on any special characteristics (ex.: Anna Louise, 29, black hair, blue eyes; also referred to as: Lou, Annalou, Pineapple, Banana)

- A list of places that appear or are referred to in the story; this is particularly important if your characters go to foreign or alien places with names that are not commonly used in English or are in languages you've made up.

- A list of difficult words—any non-English word or phrase, or uncommon usage of a word or phrase. For example, in *Salt and Silver*, our narrator says a couple of times, "I cannot even." This is a complete sentence, generally conveying frustration beyond words, but it really confused our copyeditor. Another problem is colloquial phrases, which can trip up non-native English speakers/readers. So, for example, if your character calls sidewalks "pavement" or something, note it.

- Any uncommon non-English words or phrases; whether it is French, Welsh, or an alien language you made up, it is important to provide a list of what's in the book and its translation. This is both so these things can be double-checked easily and because this way if the people working on your book are not familiar with the words, phrases, language, or font, they will know exactly what's going on anyway.

- Any particular style items. For example, Kat and I wanted "gray" to always be spelled "grey"; we wanted "sulfur" to always be spelled "sulphur"; we wanted the serial comma used. Often there is a "house style" that will be imposed upon your manuscript, but if you have a particularly strong opinion about something (or it is important somehow to your narrative), that must be said to the editor early on so everyone knows.

- A timeline. If your characters attend school, what is the school schedule? If the character works, what is the work day like? What is the order in which things happen in the book? Lists of this type can not only help your editor, copyeditor, and proofreader do a better job on your book, but it can also help you organize the events of the book.

5. After phone conversations with your editor (or anyone at your publishing company), send a follow-up email to confirm the information you exchanged—and, if you have an agent, CC your agent. This will not only help prevent miscommunication, but it will also protect you in the event that your editor (or whomever) is a jerk. Written records are the best for keeping track of things, and email is awesome because it never has to go away. (Kat and I suggest Gmail.com for a free email account with nigh unlimited space for email storage.)

6. Do not be an idiot on the internet. Editors (and agents and other people) not only search their own names, but have friends. Your editor (or agent) may not say anything to you, but rest assured: when you say mean things about your editor/agent/publisher/whoever on the internet, we know. And we don't forget. Ever.

   (Separately from being that type of idiot, check out RaceFail (`http://wiki.feministsf.net/index.php?title=RaceFail_09`) for many examples of authors losing current/future readers by being careless and/or malicious, and not apologizing for their mistakes, and defending their bad decisions. Please try not to do this, and if you make a mistake, don't defend it—just apologize. Sincerely. If you're not sorry, think about why.)

7. Let your agent do hir job. If you have an agent, let the agent do what an agent does. Let the agent handle the business stuff with your editor and publisher. Let the agent negotiate the contract. When there is a problem and you're upset, go to your agent first. Your agent can explain to you whether you're overreacting to a normal publishing process or if you have a really valid point that the *agent* will follow up on. The agent is your buffer and

part of the job is protecting your working relationship with the editor and other people at the publishing house. Use that.

8. Relatedly, ask questions. If you do not understand something, ask that it be explained. The more you understand about what's going on, the easier it is to participate in the process.

9. Be proactive with your questions, but don't be annoying. Let your agent be annoying. If you don't have an agent, say to your editor, "I have all these questions. Here is my list of questions. I don't want to be annoying, so please get to this when you have a chance, and if I don't hear from you in a week or two, I will bug you about this again." Be reasonable. Be practical.

10. Have blog posts prepped in advance. Seriously. Even if you just have a document full of rough sketches or two line ideas of what you want to write about, it will help you in the long run when you realize that authors who blog successfully write entries more than once every eight weeks.

11. NEVER TWITTER OR BLOG IN ANGER. Take a deep breath, take a step back, walk away from the computer. If you must blog about something that pisses you off, get a trusted friend who is clever to read it over for you to make sure that it doesn't read like this: STUPID MEAN HORRIBLE AWFUL HATE HATE HATE BITTER ANGRY ANNOYED!!!!! No one wants to read that except people who want to cause or observe your drama, and that's not why you want attention.

12. Related: People on the internet are often wrong (whether with reviews, comments, history, *whatever*). You will see these people, and wish to inform them of their wrongness. Perhaps even loudly. DO NOT DO IT. Don't engage, don't *talk* about how you're not engaging but you really want to, don't send other people to engage for you—just don't do it. You won't be hailed as a modern-day folk hero, or the unlikely victim of a vast conspiracy—you'll just come off as an ass. DO NOT BE AN ASS.

Anna and Kat's letter to the proofreader of *Salt and Silver*

We knew that we should have written up a reference guide to *Salt and Silver* for the copyeditor—and because we didn't do that, we paid in quite a lot of time wasted for everyone involved. When we returned the copyedited manuscript to the publisher, we included this letter to the proofreader, explaining certain things about our book, in hopes that it would make the proofreader's job easier. We're pretty sure it did.

Dear Proofreader,

We hope that you are better than our copyeditor. (It would be difficult for you to be worse.) Here are some notes for you. We hope this will help you navigate the terrain the copyeditor found so very difficult.

- Hell should *always* be capitalized. Always: Hell
- God should *never* be capitalized. Always: god
  Except there is one instance in which the hunters quote the Christian Bible: "Be gracious to me, O God, be gracious to me . . . Be merciful unto me, O God, my soul is among lions . . ." The capitalization is okay there.
- Door, when in reference to a Door to Hell, should always be capitalized. Always: Door
- Grey should *always* be grey. Sulphur should *always* be sulphur. Pretentious? Maybe.
- Stetson, Fedora, and Baseball Cap are all factions of demon hunters. Stetson and Fedora are always capitalized. Baseball Cap is only sometimes capitalized. We realize this is a pain, but we hope that you will use good sense in changing the upper- and lowercase instances.
- Backward should always be backwards. Allie's narration is protected speech, and she didn't exactly pay attention in school.
- In reference to the hand of Kalaturru, hand should be lowercase. In reference to the Hand of Franklin, hand is capitalized.

- Golem: this word is singular and plural at the same time. However, there is one instance where Allie (who does not know this) says “Golems.”
- Lamia-skin: We would appreciate a hyphen when it is a compound adjective. Like this: lamia-skin
  (for example: “lamia-skin coat”)
- Door-hound: We would appreciate a hyphen. Like this: Door-hound
  (for example: “The Door-hounds are not aspects of the Doors themselves…”)
  However, if the case ever arrives in which there should be an en-dash, we’re okay with that too.
- Roxie uses “chère” when speaking to Allie and “cher” when speaking to Ryan, because the former is feminine and the latter masculine.
- Blonde and blond are also feminine and masculine respectively. We don’t care what Merriam-Webster says. Please make sure “blonde” is used for females and “blond” is used for males.
- Sally’s Diner has red vinyl booths, blue vinyl stools at the counter, and green vinyl chairs.
- Sometimes Allie says/thinks: “I can’t even.” That is a complete sentence. No words are missing.
- There are several instances in which Allie uses “was” instead of the more proper “were”—please leave these instances alone unless you are egregiously injured by them. Even then, we wish you’d leave these instances alone.
- “Waters of life” should always be “waters of life” and *never ever* “water of life” except in one instance in which they are discussing what Scotch is called.
- Star of David should not be in italics, and it should always be capitalized.
- Seal of Solomon should not be in italics, and it should always be capitalized.
- Nothing compares *to* things, *not* with things.
- Things and people are *on* Long Island, *not* in it.
- AM should be **AM** in small caps.

A probably incomplete list of words that are not English that should be in italics:

chère
cher
mandurugo
mandurugos
Aswang
semyazza
druj
lajabless
dwen

A probably incomplete list of words that are not in English that should *not* be in italics:

loa
lamia
golem
Kabbala

A probably incomplete list of names that are nonstandard:

Ereshkigal
Ashmedai
Ištar/Ishtar
Ūsat/Isis
Hades
Kalaturru
Kurgarru

Note: There is one instance in which Kurgarru is spelled "Kurgurru"—it is the line in which Allie is attempting to pronounce the word. The narration says, "I have totally slaughtered that . . ." and the word is deliberately misspelled to reflect that.

A probably incomplete list of the character names:

Allie/Autumn (Pitocchelli)
Ryan/Rian (Corveau)
Roxie
Christian
Jackson
Amanda (Rios)
Stan (Charles Standish IV/Dish)
Narnia
Dawn
Jimmy
Homeless Guy/Dougal
Owen/David
Jake
Tiara
Fagey
Moshe
Theresa
Smith
Curlique
Starr
Tommy
Reynard
Nox
Jessica
Turtle
California/Cal
Betsy (original coffin nail)
Steely Dan (new coffin nail, at the ending)

Thank you!