Manuscript Formatting: Beyond 101

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I know people are always nagging you about formatting your manuscript. This is going to be another post about that. *However*, this is not a post about Manuscript Formatting 101 (12 point Courier New, double-spaced, with 1" margins all the way around, your name and the title of the book in the upper left hand corner, and the page number in the upper and lower right hand corners). No, this is a post about the *other* parts of formatting. The parts that no one seems to ever talk about! This is even in easy to follow bullet points. Come on, you know you love bullet points!

- Emphasis. Here are the basic rules of emphasizing things in manuscripts:
    - DON'T put anything in *italics*; if you have properly formatted your manuscript (in 12 point Courier New), italics are going to be difficult for the reader to easily see.

    - DON'T emphasize things by using **bold**. When was the last time you saw something emphasized in bold in a printed book? Pretty much never.

    - DO emphasize using <u>underlining.</u> In most word processing programs, you can easily do this using the keyboard command CNTRL+U or CMMD+U. Editors, copyeditors, and typesetters all read underlining as italics. I know it sounds weird to you, but trust me: this is the secret language of manuscripts.

      When something is underlined for another reason—like, say, you want someone's thoughts to be italicized in the final book—and you want to emphasize a word within that already-underlined text, just drop the underlining. You've seen that in books, too. Example:

      Manuscript format:

I wish I was as rich and handsome and smart as Dwight, Jim thought. Dwight is never at a loss for words.

Final book format:
I wish I was as rich and handsome and smart as Dwight, Jim thought. *Dwight is* never *at a loss for words.*

- The punctuation immediately following an underlined sentence, word, or phrase should also be underlined.

- DON'T start your chapter halfway down the page when you are writing the book. Oh, you can if you want to, but it involves a lot of carriage returns (pressing ENTER/RETURN over and over again), and it means that if at any time you need to reformat your manuscript, it's going to do something funky when the manuscript reflows. (Reflowing on your computer is when the file recalibrates its page count for five minutes while you play Plants Vs. Zombies.)

- DO use the "Page Break" function in your word processing program. Wherever a chapter ends, just hit "insert page break" and then start your new chapter right there at the beginning of the next page.

- DO use the pound sign (#) to indicate a scene change. There is no need for six carriage returns every time you change a scene. Even worse is when you forget that you'd only been using five, start using six, then switch back to five... The pound sign (#) is a symbol to the publishing professionals that there's a scene change, and there's no need for anything else to indicate it. Additionally, many editors (acquiring editors, content editors, production editors, copyeditors...) can look at a manuscript that is properly formatted and tell how long the finished book is going to be, or how many signatures it will need. Just from looking at the page count or stack of pages of a properly formatted manuscript. Those six carriage returns at every scene change will definitely throw that estimate way off!

- DON'T bother putting two spaces after every period. That is a holdover from typewriters. If you're using a fancy typeface, it might be useful or necessary, *but you are using 12 point Courier New, I am sure*, so it's not.

- Anything you want to put in quotation marks that is *already* in quotation marks should be in single quotes instead of double. For example:

  > "Dwight says the name of the song is 'Endless Love' and the name of the episode it's in is 'Dwight Will Always Beat You'—but I think he's lying," Jim told Pam.

- Titles of songs, short stories, and episodes of television shows should always go in quotes. Names of albums, complete books, and television shows should always be underlined.

- When using the em-dash, do not put spaces around it. DO turn off your auto-complete. In a properly formatted manuscript, the auto-complete em-dash is difficult to see. You want your em-dash to be two hyphens used together, like this: --

- Ellipsis rules:
  - When using the ellipsis, turn off your auto-complete. In a properly formatted manuscript, the auto-complete ellipsis is difficult to see and hard for the copyeditor to mark properly. You want your ellipsis to be three periods, either one after the other, or with one space in between each. For example: **...** OR **. . .**

  - If the ellipsis is within single or double quotes, there should not be a space between the final dot and the quote mark.

  - In general, there is no need for extra punctuation after an ellipsis. **...?** or **..?** and **...!** or **..!** should be used extremely sparingly. **...,** or **..,** should never be used at all.

  - Sometimes an ellipsis that ends a sentence will have an extra dot at the end to indicate a period. It is up to your aesthetics whether you'd like to embrace that.

- The indent of the first sentence of a paragraph should be 1/2" or 0.5". While technically you can do this by hitting the space bar five times, *please just use the tab key*. Some word processing programs even have a way you can set your body text to automatically indent the first line of every paragraph.