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**Manuscript Format (Title)
by Firstname Lastname**

Chapter One

Setting (if necessary – especially in a historical)
Time (if necessary – especially in a historical)

Indent/Tab five spaces, and begin writing your double-spaced text. Most publishers prefer Courier New 12-point or Times New Roman 12-point. Your page margins should be one-inch all the way around. And, of course, you never print on more than one side of the paper. Please paperclip your pages together. Do not staple. On the first page of each chapter, start approximately half-way down the page with your chapter header and then begin your text.

On the very first page of your manuscript, type your name, address, and telephone number/email/web address in the upper left-hand corner. In the upper right-hand corner, indicate your word count (and your copyright, if you prefer, although that is not always recommended). On subsequent pages, you will need your last name, title, and page number in the header in the upper right-hand corner. (Always pay attention to contest rules and/or editorial preferences for different publishers because there can be special formatting considerations.)

Using proper grammar and mechanics and following industry conventions are vital to your success. If you are uncertain about any of the basic grammar/mechanics in the following paragraphs, invest in a good grammar handbook or reference guide, or, even better, consider taking a class.

Quite simply, a sentence is a subject-plus-verb (and possibly a[n] object[s]) that together complete an idea. Sentences come in many varieties: simple, compound, complex, and any combination thereof. A run-on is more than one sentence joined together with improper or no punctuation to create an over-long thought. A fragment is missing one of the main sentence components (subject, verb, or complete idea). A comma splice is two sentences joined by a comma (without the necessary conjunction). Then, moving up one level from sentencing, you must also know how to paragraph properly.

Make sure you know how to use commas (and periods, semi-colons, colons, question marks, exclamation points, ellipses, dashes, etc.) properly. (Most people don't. Trust the English instructor.) There are specific rules for using them. And, of course, make sure your pronouns and antecedents, your subjects and verbs, and your verb tenses all agree.

"You also need to know how to properly write and punctuate dialogue," an experienced writer explained, pausing from her exposition.

"But isn't some dialogue tricky to punctuate?" a new writer asked.

"It can be," Experienced Writer replied. "But once you know the basics, it's pretty easy."

"If you say so."

"Very good, New Writer. You just illustrated something I was going to explain."

"What?"

"That, often, you don't need tag lines with dialogue. Losing them can quicken the pace

and keep the flow of the dialogue more natural – as long as it’s still clear who is actually speaking. . . .”

“Really. Hmm. I didn’t know that.”

“Yes,” Experienced Writer said. “It’s just something to take note of. You do want your reader to find your dialogue believable, as if someone were really speaking those words.”

“Yes, I suppose that’s true. But what if I don’t know how to properly punctuate or even write good, natural-sounding dialogue? What if, say, I want to stress the way someone says a certain word?”

Experienced Writer gave New Writer a knowing smile. “Just underline it. Underlining serves the same purpose as italics, but the convention in our industry is to underline. . . for historical reasons we don’t need to go into right now.”

“Oh. Well, that makes sense.”

“And if you’re unsure about proper grammar and mechanics for dialogue, again, there are plenty of books out there that can help with that. It would certainly be a shame to lose out on a potential publishing deal for a fantastic story because your manuscript looks bad, either in format or grammatical/mechanical errors, don’t you think?”

New Writer nodded her agreement.

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So, the keys to proper formatting are: knowing the industry conventions (and following them), using proper grammar and mechanics, and following the formatting rules specific to the contest/publishing house/critique group you are submitting to. If you ever have questions regarding the Chicago-North manuscript format guidelines, just ask the Manuscript Chairperson or other long-standing member.

“Sample Manuscript Format” article by Marika McKiernan

--text, formatting, and proper grammar/mechanics herein guaranteed by an M.A. in linguistics and college-level English instructor