

Writers Write and Typesetters Set!

by Chris Pelicano

Recently, I received two Microsoft Word documents containing the manuscript for a couple books I was about to design and typeset. The author had obviously spent a great deal of time and effort to use several fancy fonts and varying point sizes and colors. The entire document was center justified. It was an elaborate attempt by a competent author to engage in amateur typesetting. All the fonts, sizes, colors, and paragraph formatting was counter productive to the purpose of copywriting, which is to write good, compelling, error-free copy (content). Writers should concentrate on ... you guessed it ... writing.

Graphic Designers and typesetters, on the other hand, are responsible for taking good copy (content) and formatting it so it is both legible and aesthetically compelling. This is best achieved by starting with unformatted plain text ... copy that is accurately key-stroked but has a minimum of typestyle formatting.

There are four main reasons for submitting copy in manuscript format (MF):

1. Copy Editing – Only approved, proofread, and edited copy should be typeset. MF facilitates easy proofreading and editing.

2. Typesetting – Minimal formatting allows the typesetter to keystroke or scan the manuscript with fewer errors ... or flow the electronic MF file into the typesetting layout with fewer chances of formatting conflicts and fewer extraneous features to remove.

3. Word Counts – Most book publishers need to accurately estimate the space that the final text will take up in the published version of a written work. This involves counting characters, (spaces, lines and characters per page) not just words. MF facilitates easy character counting by using monospaced fonts sized at 12 pt and set at a line length of about 60 characters.

4. Manuscript Handling – This is a workflow and working method issue. It recognizes that many editors and typesetters (as well as proofreaders and designers) prefer to work with hard copies of written work as their source material for electronic typesetting/formatting. MF has a proven track record as a professional "industry standard" that should not hastily be set aside.

To learn more about submitting copy for designers/typesetters do a internet search for "Manuscript Format". For starters, I suggest the article below. Happy copywriting!

"Proper Manuscript Format" by William Shunn

<http://www.shunn.net/format/story.html>