

FREE RESOURCE

Manuscript submission checklist

What to prepare before you send your work to an Australian publisher or literary agent. Every publisher and agent sets their own rules, so use this list alongside their guidelines, not instead of them.

1. Read the guidelines first

- ☐ I have read the submission guidelines on each publisher's or agent's own website carefully.
- ☐ They publish or represent my kind of book (genre, form, age group, fiction or non-fiction).
- ☐ I know whether they accept unsolicited manuscripts, take submissions only during open windows, or only through an agent.
- ☐ I know exactly what they want to see: the full manuscript, the first chapters or a set number of words, a synopsis, a cover letter, a bio.
- ☐ I know how they want it sent (online form, email or post), which file format, and what to put in the subject line.
- ☐ I have noted any deadlines, and how long they say to wait before following up.

2. The manuscript

- ☐ The draft is finished and revised, not a first draft. For most fiction, publishers and agents expect a complete manuscript.
- ☐ Standard formatting, unless the guidelines say otherwise: a plain 12pt font, double-spaced, about 2.5 cm margins, left-aligned.
- ☐ Page numbers on every page, with my surname and the title in the header.
- ☐ Each chapter starts on a new page. Scene breaks are clearly marked (for example, a centred #).
- ☐ A title page with the title, my name, contact details and an approximate word count.
- ☐ Spelling and style are consistent throughout, and it has been proofread, ideally by someone other than me.
- ☐ The file is named clearly, for example Surname_Title_Manuscript.docx.

3. The synopsis

- ☐ It tells the whole story, including the ending. A synopsis is not a teaser.
- ☐ It is written in the present tense and third person, and introduces the main characters by name.
- ☐ It fits the length asked for. If none is given, one page is a sensible default.

4. The cover letter or query

- ☐ Addressed to the right person or team by name where the guidelines give one, and the name is spelt correctly.
- ☐ States the title, genre or form, and word count in the first paragraph.
- ☐ A short pitch: who the book is about, what they want and what is at stake, in a paragraph or two.
- ☐ Mentions a few comparable recent books, if I can do so honestly, and why I am sending it to this publisher or agent.
- ☐ Kept to about one page, professional and warm. No gimmicks.

5. The author bio

- ☐ A short paragraph in the third person, unless asked otherwise.
- ☐ Includes relevant publications, prizes, study or experience, and anything that connects me to the book.
- ☐ If I have no publications yet, that's fine. I keep it brief and honest.

6. Sending it and keeping track

- ☐ I have checked whether simultaneous submissions are allowed. If they are, I say so in my letter.
- ☐ If my manuscript is accepted elsewhere, I will tell everyone still considering it straight away and withdraw it.
- ☐ I keep a simple record of where I sent it, when, what I sent, and the response.
- ☐ I wait for the response time stated before following up, and I follow up once, politely.
- ☐ I never pay a fee to have my work read by an agent. If a publisher asks me to pay to be published, I find out exactly what I would be paying for before going further.

Look after yourself through this part. Rejections are common and usually say more about a list's needs than about your writing. Keep going, keep revising, and keep a copy of every version.