



Secrets of Style

A practical guide for today's
Jewish writer

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IT SEEMS LIKE EDITORS HAVE AN ARCANES

code, and no matter how much you try, it's impossible to crack it. Why is the word *simchah* italicized but not "Shechinah" and "mitzvah"? What makes an editor decide to lowercase "divine" but capitalize "Throne of Glory"?

There are a lot of rules that an editor must take into consideration when making these decisions. But many editorial decisions are also a matter of style.

It would be impossible to rail off just a few rules "on one foot" that will answer all your style questions. (If you don't believe me, check out the 1,026-page *Chicago Manual of Style*—just one of the reference sources that editors use to make their style decisions.) Here are a few basic rules that will allow you to submit cleaner copy and get more of an inkling of what's going on inside your editor's head.



SOME BASICS

1. Remember that rule you learned in typewriting class (back in the olden days)? You were told to always type two spaces between each sentence. Nix it. In published copy, use only single spaces between sentences.
2. Before you submit your article or book, do a spellcheck. An editor who sees a lot of typos assumes sloppy writing that may be time-consuming to edit—a disadvantage you can easily fix.
3. Commas and periods always precede closing quote marks. (If you're British, you may need time to adjust to this rule. I know a good therapist if you need one to help with American style issues.)
4. There's no room here for a grammar lesson, but matching tenses, making sure verbs and nouns agree (singular vs. plural), and avoiding ambiguous pronouns will make a big difference. Maybe the difference between rejection and publication.
5. In dialogue, start a new paragraph when a new character begins speaking. Dialogue should be natural. Say your dialogue out loud (maybe in a locked room so people don't think you're beginning to talk to yourself) to see how it sounds. If it sounds odd, change it.
6. Be conscious of paragraph length. Keep in mind that a paragraph in Word is much longer in a printed book or magazine.

TRANSLITERATION

Of all the rules of editing, transliteration rules seem the most arcane of all. I'll let you in on a secret: some editors who have been working for years still struggle with it. Thankfully, the writer is not required to transliterate perfectly—you truly can leave that to the copyeditor. But here are a few basics you may want to follow to polish your copy:

1. Foreign words should be italicized. Although every publisher has its own interpretation of this rule, a foreign word is defined as a word that does not appear in the English language dictionary. That's why "Shechinah" and "mitzvah" are usually not italicized. Believe it or not, these words do appear in Webster's dictionary (the one editors use is Merriam-Webster's Collegiate edition).
2. In transliteration, English consonants are substituted for Hebrew consonants (for example, "p" for *peh* and "ch" for *ches* and *chaf*) and English vowels for Hebrew vowels (for example, "a" for *patach* and "e" for *segol*). Each publisher has its exceptions, but if you follow this substitution method, you can competently transliterate most words. Even if the editor ends up changing some of your spellings, at least your manuscript will look more polished when you submit. If you decide that this is not for you (which I *completely* understand), at least now you know what's going on behind the scenes.
3. Capitalize transliterated words if you capitalize their English counterparts; otherwise, lowercase. For example, "Tabernacle" is capitalized, so capitalize "Mishkan."
4. Names of months, holidays, people, organizations, places, and divine Names are capitalized and not italicized. For other proper nouns, consult your local reliable editor.

FORMATTING

There is nothing like a clean, properly formatted manuscript to make a publisher sit up and pay attention. It's the first impression they get of your work and nothing says professional like good formatting (well, except maybe for, you know, good writing). Here are a few simple formatting tips:

1. Some writers like to have *FUN WITH FONTS*. Don't be tempted. For one thing, it can make your submission unreadable, especially if your publisher doesn't have that same exotic font; Word will probably replace it with an even more exotic font that your publisher can't read. For another, the designer will not be using that font anyway, so you might as well choose a font that's readable. Times New Roman, Arial, and Garamond are three basic, universal fonts that you can use.
2. *FUN WITH FONTS* applies to font size as well: 12 points is a nice readable font size. Remember: just because you use a 16 point font does not make the book longer. Length is measured by word count, not pages (see "WORD COUNT" below).
3. Don't use the Tab key to indent your paragraphs. Instead, code a first-line indent into your paragraphs: select the text with Ctl-A, go to Paragraph (in Home) > Special, and select First Line Indent. A half-inch indent is ideal.
4. Don't add a lot of extra hard paragraph breaks (when you press Enter) to make blank lines. If you like space between your paragraphs, code it into the paragraph itself. Select the text with Ctl-A. Go to Paragraph > Before and After, and type in the amount of space you want between paragraphs.
5. In Paragraph, you can also select your line spacing. We like 1.5 or double spacing for easy readability.

WORD COUNT

The length of a book or article is measured by word count, not pages. In Word, you can find the word count on the bottom left-hand corner, or under Review. No matter how much you manipulate the text—adding space between lines, using a larger font, inserting lots of page breaks—it's the word count that...counts. There are always exceptions to the rules, but here's a basic guide for fiction writers:

Children's picture books: 350–600 words

Early chapter books: 10,000–20,000 words

Middle school grade (ages 8–12): 20,000–35,000 words

Young adult: 50,000–70,000 words

Short adult novels: 60,000–80,000 words (250–300 page book)

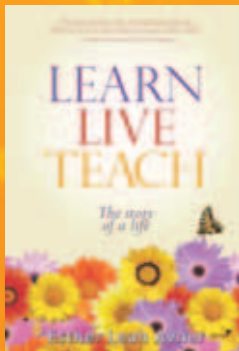
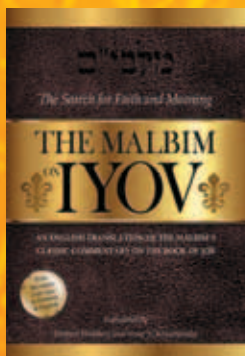
Long adult novels: 80,000–100,000 words (300–400 page book)

Epic tomes that probably need cutting: Over 110,000 words

If you want to learn more, come join my copyediting course. For information, contact me at editor@brandnamepublishing.com.

Good luck!
Suri Brand

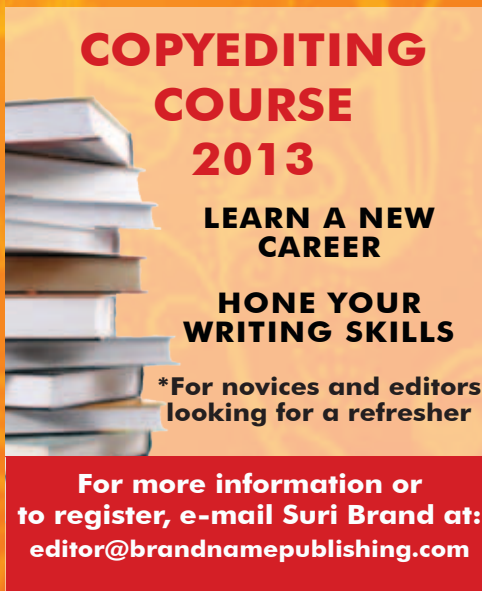





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