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LAYOUT FOR FICTION TEXT

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Start Writing Fiction

Layout for fiction text

Paragraphing in your stories should look like this:

This is the opening of the piece of fiction that you are undertaking, and has therefore used the left-hand margin. You can see it uses double-line spacing but the first paragraph isn't indented.

This is the opening of the second paragraph. It has been clearly indented from the margin, and there is no space between the first paragraph and the second paragraph. This pattern should continue throughout a prose piece, until there is a section break, as indicated above.

It is a new day and therefore this paragraph begins after a line space (but without an indentation) to indicate a shift in time and that this is in effect a new section.

Presentation of dialogue in stories

The general rule is that each character's speech should begin a new paragraph – indented, of course. Use single quotation marks for all speech and quoted words within your text (this is a UK norm; the convention may vary internationally). Use double quotation marks only when the quoted word or phrase occurs within a passage which is already in quotation marks.

Readers will have big problems and potentially get very confused if the layout isn't clear.

Before you get to the editing stage with your story, check that the format and layout of your piece is readable and that you have followed all the guidelines on layout.

For instance, look at two versions of a piece of dialogue:

A

They were standing outside by the car. 'I can't explain it,' she said. 'I've just gone off you.' 'So you're not going to give me an explanation,' Stephen said. 'Just that you've "gone off" me.'

B

They were standing outside by the car.

'I can't explain it,' she said. 'I've just gone off you.'

'So you're not going to give me an explanation,' Stephen said. 'Just that you've "gone off" me?'

In A the reader gets confused about who is speaking. This is much clearer in B, using the recommended and more conventional layout. Make sure that you have that sort of clarity in the layout in your story.