

TDS Readers Submission Critique

Instructions

For internal use only

Following are the instructions for reading, evaluating, and completing the Submission Critique Form on Survey Monkey. If you have any questions, be sure to contact Bre asap.

When you open the submission, you begin assessing it – before ever reading it.

Look at “how” the form is completed. A minor error (missing word/line count or genre) is not a big deal, but major errors (no synopsis) are a concern because they indicate the professionalism of the creative and give hints toward the quality of the piece.

Automatically check to see if the piece was labeled correctly and if the document has author information on the upper lefthand corner, with name and page numbers in the header.

For **fiction**, the author should use Shunn’s story format: <https://www.shunn.net/format/story/>

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL [shunn.net/format/story/](https://www.shunn.net/format/story/). The page title is "Proper Manuscript Format / Shunn". The main content area displays contact information for William Shunn (he/him) at 12 Courier Place, Pica's Fount, NY 12012, with phone number (212) 555-1212 and email format@shunn.net. It also notes he is an active member of SCHWA and that the page is about 1,500 words. The central text reads: "Proper Manuscript Format by Bill Shunn. No one knows how many good stories are passed over because the manuscripts containing them are poorly formatted. We can be certain, however, that editors will more eagerly read a cleanly formatted manuscript than a cluttered and clumsy one. Here are a". To the right, there is a book cover for "An Alternate History of the 21st Century" and a section titled "Recent Posts" with several links to formatting tips.

For **poetry**, the poet should use Shunn’s poetry format: <https://www.shunn.net/format/poetry/>

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Proper Manuscript Format / Shunn

ABOUT SHORT STORY FORMAT NOVEL FORMAT POETRY FORMAT TEMPLATES MORE ON FORMATTING WILLIAM SHUNN THE ACCIDENTAL TERRORIST

should continue to the next with a hanging indent. If a poem runs more than one page, each following page requires a header as shown.

William Shunn (he/him) 27 lines
 12 Courier Place
 Pica's Font, NY 12012
 (212) 555-1212
 format@shunn.net

Memory Lane

She strains at the leash,
 Trying to turn the corner.
 "Not that way," I say.

But Ella insists,
 So I give in and follow.
 Not that big a deal.

This short, narrow lane,
 It's a valid path back home,
 Not such a detour.

Along the sidewalk
 We wish we ~~are~~ stretched out straight



Go deeper with [More on Formatting](#), William Shunn's look at advanced topics in manuscript formatting. Submit your questions to info at format dot ms. We regret that we cannot respond to all submissions individually, nor can we accept or open email attachments.

Recent Posts

- To pronoun or not to pronoun —that is the initial question
- "Proper Manuscript Format" now comes in two distinct flavors
- Indenting paragraphs without

You should also become familiar with the **The Dark Sire (TDS)** guidelines, located at <https://www.darksiremag.com/guidelines.html>


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THE DARK SIRE

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When submitting shorts and poetry, please be sure that each work is:

- Formatted correctly, including 1" margins on all sides, double-spacing (fiction only), page numbers, and **American Letter** (8.5"x11", not A4)
- Typed in **Garamond** 12-point font using the TAB key for indents (do NOT use the ruler, paragraph, indent, or spacing features)
- No longer than 5,000 words (fiction) or 2 pages (poetry)
- Written in English
- Saved in WORD Document (.doc/.docx) format with **SS** (short story) or **P** (poem), author last name, shortened title, and genre (EX: SS_Stephens_TheVampireArgos_Gothic)



Shelley

permitted, as is monsters, devils, angels, and killers. Slasher friendly. Influence includes Shelley and King.



o Psychological
 Special interest in psychological horror tales with deep, inner character development

The screenshot shows a web browser displaying the website 'THE DARK SIRE'. The navigation menu includes Home, About, Issues, TDS Authors/Artists, Subscribe, Submissions+, Contact, Blog, and Cart. The main content area is titled 'THE DARK SIRE' and contains submission guidelines. The guidelines state: 'When submitting artwork, please be sure that each image is:' followed by a list of requirements: high-quality photography (300 dpi/high resolution), accompanied by label information on submission form (with a link to 'https://thepracticalartworld.com/2011/05/18/how-to-label-artwork-in-an-exhibition/'), original work, saved as a .jpeg, and labeled with artist's name, title of piece, material, and year created (example: Stephens_Argos_Acrylic_2018). Below the list, it says 'Submissions (including simultaneous submissions but not reprints) are accepted online only via our submissions page. If your submission does not follow the guidelines presented, the editor will immediately disregard it without further notice. Those creatives selected for publication will be contacted. If you haven't been contacted within 4-6 months, consider your submission rejected.'

To the right of the guidelines, there is a section titled 'Influence includes Dostoevsky.' and another section titled 'o Art' which says 'Color and B&W artwork accepted, with a special interest in abstract and dark-themed works. Influences include Bosch, Fuseli, Pollock, Richter, and Kandinsky.'

In the center, there is a small abstract painting by Richter, with the name 'Richter' written below it.

Our guidelines **supersede** Shunn's whenever conflict occurs.

After briefly looking over the submission form and document formatting, you can start reading.

It is imperative that the story flows, has good chemistry, piques your interest as a reader, and represents the genres we print. While reading, keep the following in mind:

Does the story truly fall into our represented subgenres – gothic (Poe), horror (Shelley/King), fantasy (Tolkien), psychological realism (Dostoevsky)?

Note: We do NOT accept Sci-Fi or weird fiction in any form!

Is the story dark in tone or theme?

Does it push limits?

Is it just light/fluffy (surface darkness) OR does it grab you and hold on (deep darkness)?

Is the author holding back? Do they need to go deeper into the dark tone/theme?

What's the subject matter/message?

Is the author addressing a social issue? Which one?

Are metaphors being used that address mental health, societal decay, personal identity?

Is the piece communicating an agenda or challenging societal thoughts? How?

Does the story have way overused cliché? Push author biases? **Not interested!**

How "dark" is dark?

1 – light (PG; not much darkness, could use more to heighten suitability)

2 – light-medium (PG-13; some darkness, more may be needed but could be good as is)

3 – medium (R; good amount of darkness, great balance of story)

4 – medium-high (NC-17; high level of darkness, borderline too much)

5 – high (X; morbidly disturbing or Satanic, crosses the line) **PLEASE NOTE: We do NOT print level 5 content. If in doubt of a level breach, always ask for a EIC 2nd opinion.**

Was there a full story?

Does it have a clear beginning, middle, and end? **ALL fiction must have this!**

Was the writing polished?

Does it flow?

Does it have good character development?

Does it have a solid plot, no confusing holes?

Does it have grammar/punctuation issues?

Once you are done reading, you can suggest the story to be accepted, rejected, held for a 2nd opinion, or put on the conditional list.

ACCEPTED: You believe 100% that this story needs to be printed and it is ready, as is, for publication now. No extra work is done. Send it to the Editor-in-Chief (EIC).

REJECTED: You do NOT believe the story is interesting or good for the **TDS** brand/readership because of content issues. These issues are just too bad to consider. This could also be because the submission was messy or missing important information. If the story is weak and the submission subpar, it's usually rejected.

HELD FOR 2nd OPINION: You liked the story but there was just something that causes you to hesitate. You may not know why you're hesitating or maybe it's because it crosses a line either with you because of personal bias (ex: subject matter) or a level 5 breach. For whatever reason, you can't really accept it but the story is good so you don't want to completely reject it. When you're not sure, you ask for another reader to review the submission. Any level 5 breach should be brought to the attention of the EIC for review.

CONDITIONAL ACCEPT: You know the story is good and you want to suggest it for publication BUT the story needs a little more polishing before we can print it. Things like grammar and punctuation will always fall into this category, as will plot issues and story development problems. If the story is good, but not great, and you feel a little more guided work will push the piece up a level, suggest it for the conditional list. This will alert the EIC to an author who needs help in polishing their work and an editor will be assigned.

The last step in the submission critique is to fill-out the Readers Submission Critique form, which is sent directly to the EIC.

To fill out the form, visit: <https://www.darksiremag.com/subcritique.html>

The form is through Survey Monkey and is user-friendly. It has 10 questions.

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL [darksiremag.com/subcritique.html](https://www.darksiremag.com/subcritique.html). The page header includes the logo 'THE DARK SIRE' and navigation links: Home, About, Issues, TDS Authors/Artists, Subscribe, Submissions +, Contact, Blog, and Cart. The form contains four input fields:

- Reader's Name *
Your answer _____
- Author *
Your answer _____
- Title *
Your answer _____
- Word/Line Count *
Your answer _____

1. Input YOUR name as the person who's reading the submission
2. Input the author's name, as it appears on the **submission form**
3. Title of piece
4. Word count (fiction) or line count (poetry)

The screenshot shows the continuation of the form. It includes a navigation menu at the top and three question blocks:

- Genre *
Your answer _____
- Darkness Level
 1 - PG
 2 - PG-13
 3 - R
 4 - NC-17
 5 - X (Woah! Too dark?)
- Were guidelines followed? *
 Completely

To the right of the form is a dark, atmospheric photograph of several lit candles in holders, casting a warm glow in a dimly lit room.

5. Genre

6. Darkness Level **REMEMBER: If it's X, mark it as such and explain in #10**
7. Check all that apply concerning submission quality (guidelines followed?)

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL 'darksiremag.com/subcritique.html'. The page header includes the site name 'THE DARK SIRE' and navigation links: Home, About, Issues, TDS Authors/Artists, Subscribe, Submissions +, Contact, Blog, and Cart. The main content area contains three form sections:

- Accept ***: A radio button selection area with four options: Yes, No, Maybe (needs 2nd opinion), and Conditional (needs polished).
- Explain your acceptance/rejection decision ***: A text input field labeled 'Your answer'.
- Comments to Editor-in-Chief or Associate Editor ***: A text input field labeled 'Your answer'.

8. Select your decision for accepting/rejecting the submission
9. Explain your reasoning for accepting/rejecting the submission
10. Add any additional notes you may have. This could be notes you wish to share with the EIC for consideration of the piece or to request a 2nd Reader. It can also be used to talk directly to an editor about a conditional accept, giving more information about the problems/issues you saw in the piece that need polished.

That's it! You're done. Just click SUBMIT and the form will be sent.

You need to complete one form for each submission you read. Submission with multiple poems **MUST** be critiqued one-by-one and **NOT** as a collection.

Ideally, turn around time on reading and critiquing is **1 week** from the time you're assigned a story. However, we're all busy people and schedules change. Do your best to return submission critiques in no more than 2 weeks. When submissions are heavy, turn around time will change to 1-3 months.

THANK YOU FOR ALL YOUR HELP AND SUPPORT!

If you have questions, please lmk asap.