Poetry Society of Tennessee Common Contest Submission Errors

January 2, 2021

Contest Errors – It's a Great Time for Reminders

- NFSPS contests due 3/15
- PST contests due the 15th of every month
- Multiple other state contests are ongoing
- Errors could mean the difference between a "placed" poem, an honorable mention, or being disregarded entirely

Basic Contest Submissions (part 1)

STANDARD FONT (12 POINT, TIMES NEW ROMAN OR SIMILAR)

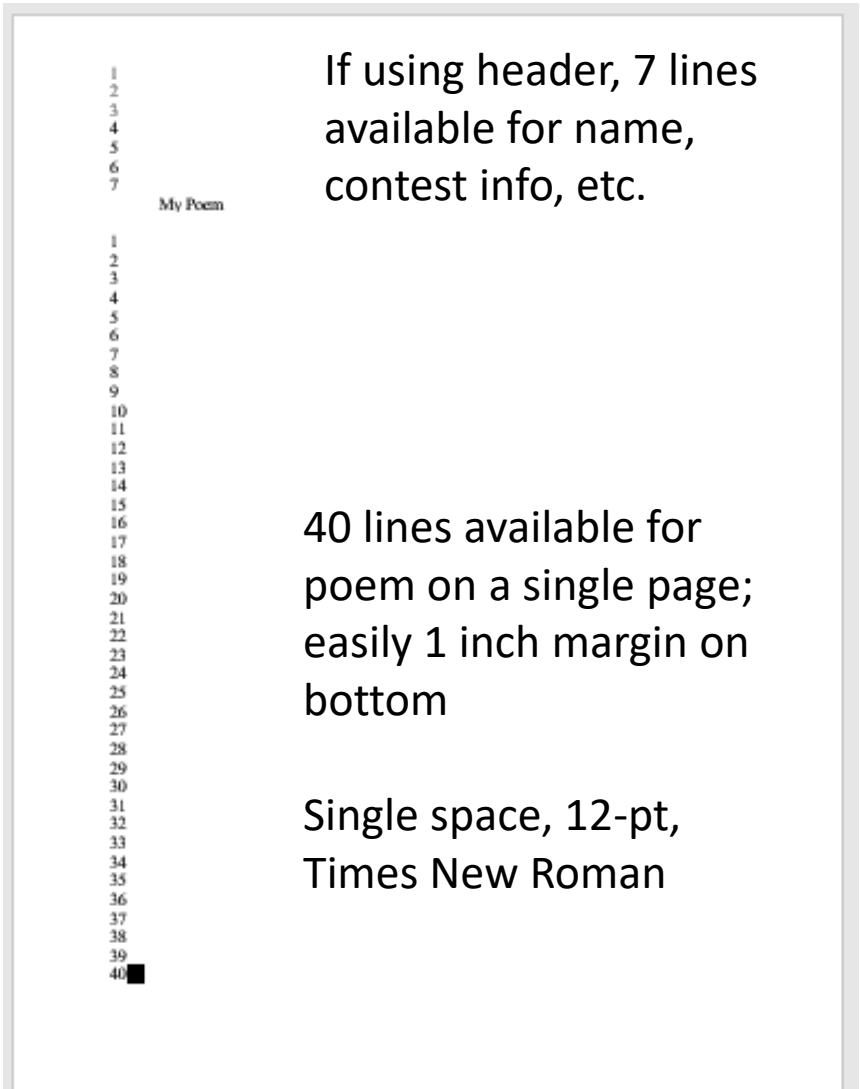
SINGLE SPACE

STANDARD MARGINS

LEFT JUSTIFY…UNLESS NECESSARY FOR YOUR POEM'S MEANING

SOME CONTESTS HAVE CHARACTER COUNT LIMITS…CHECK RULES

Be Mindful of Lines/ Character Count

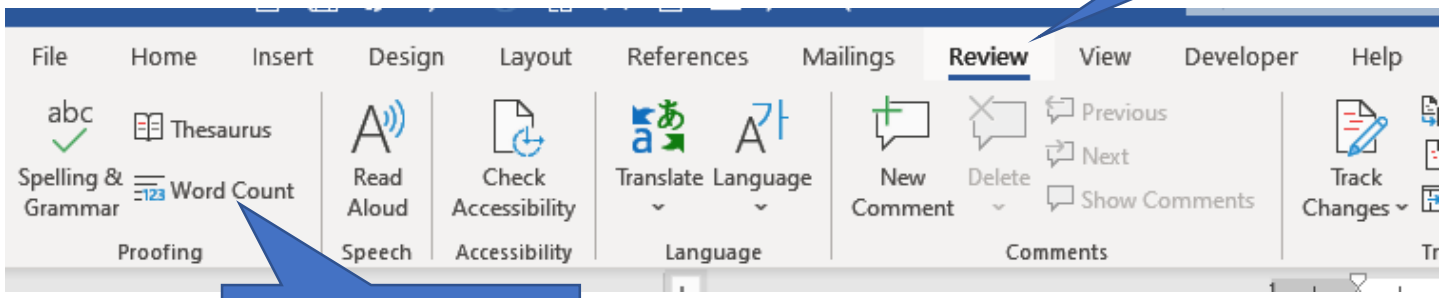


If using header, 7 lines available for name, contest info, etc.

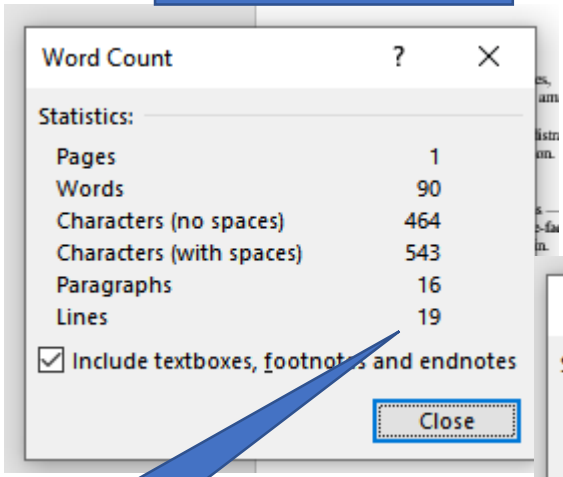
40 lines available for poem on a single page; easily 1 inch margin on bottom

Single space, 12-pt, Times New Roman

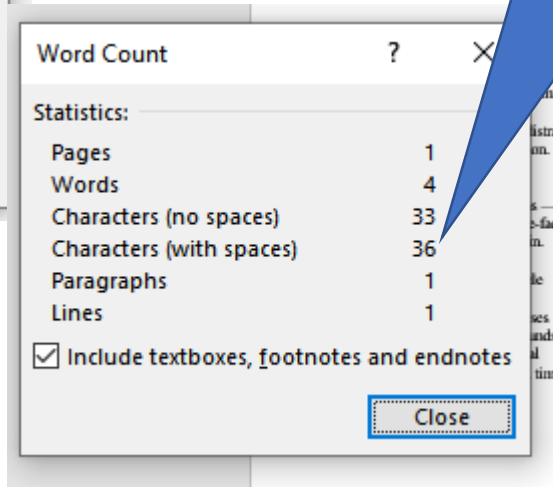
At the top of your screen click Review Tab



Under the Review menu, on the left, click Word Count



Highlight your longest line for a character check; check rules for max line length based on publication (Encore, Tennessee Voices)



Highlight poem; check total lines

Why?...Line Length

- Contest chairs like entries on one page!
- Winning poems of 40 lines or less work best for anthology designs
- Excessive line counts mean more pages per poem, and higher anthology costs

SPECIAL NOTE:

NFSPS (and some other contests) include blank lines as part of their line count. Check rules for each contest!

Why?...Character Length

- Contests which are publishing poems define character lengths according to their anthology format
- Their maximum character length is provided so YOU can design your poem (visually) the way you want
- If you exceed maximum character length, and are published, the anthology editor reserves the right to re-format your poem

Examples – Font and Spacing

My poem

Roses are red,
violets are blue.
All poets are cool –
this means you

Times New Roman 12 pt
Single space

My poem

Roses are red,
violets are blue.
All poets are cool –
this means you

Times New Roman 14 pt
Single space

My poem

Roses are red,
violets are blue.
All poets are cool –
this means you

Tahoma 12 pt
Single space

My poem

Roses are red,
violets are blue.
All poets are cool –
this means you

Calibri 12 pt
Single space

Paragraph spacing,
0 pt before
0 pt after

All likely acceptable by judges
14 point is going to be large compared to other poems, spacing will seem off; may drive poem onto 2 pages

My poem

Roses are red,
violets are blue.
All poets are cool –
this means you

My poem

Roses are red,
violets are blue.
All poets are cool –
this means you

My poem

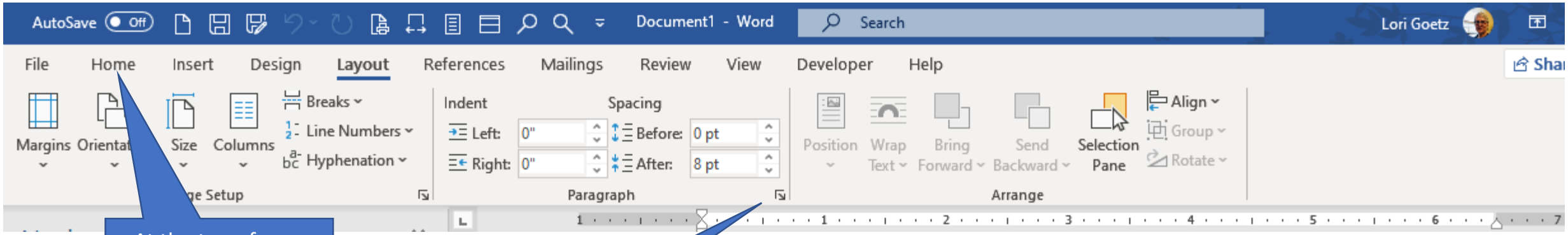
Roses are red,
violets are blue.
All poets are cool –
this means you

My poem

Roses are red,
violets are blue.
All poets are cool –
this means you

Paragraph spacing,
0 pt before
6 pt after

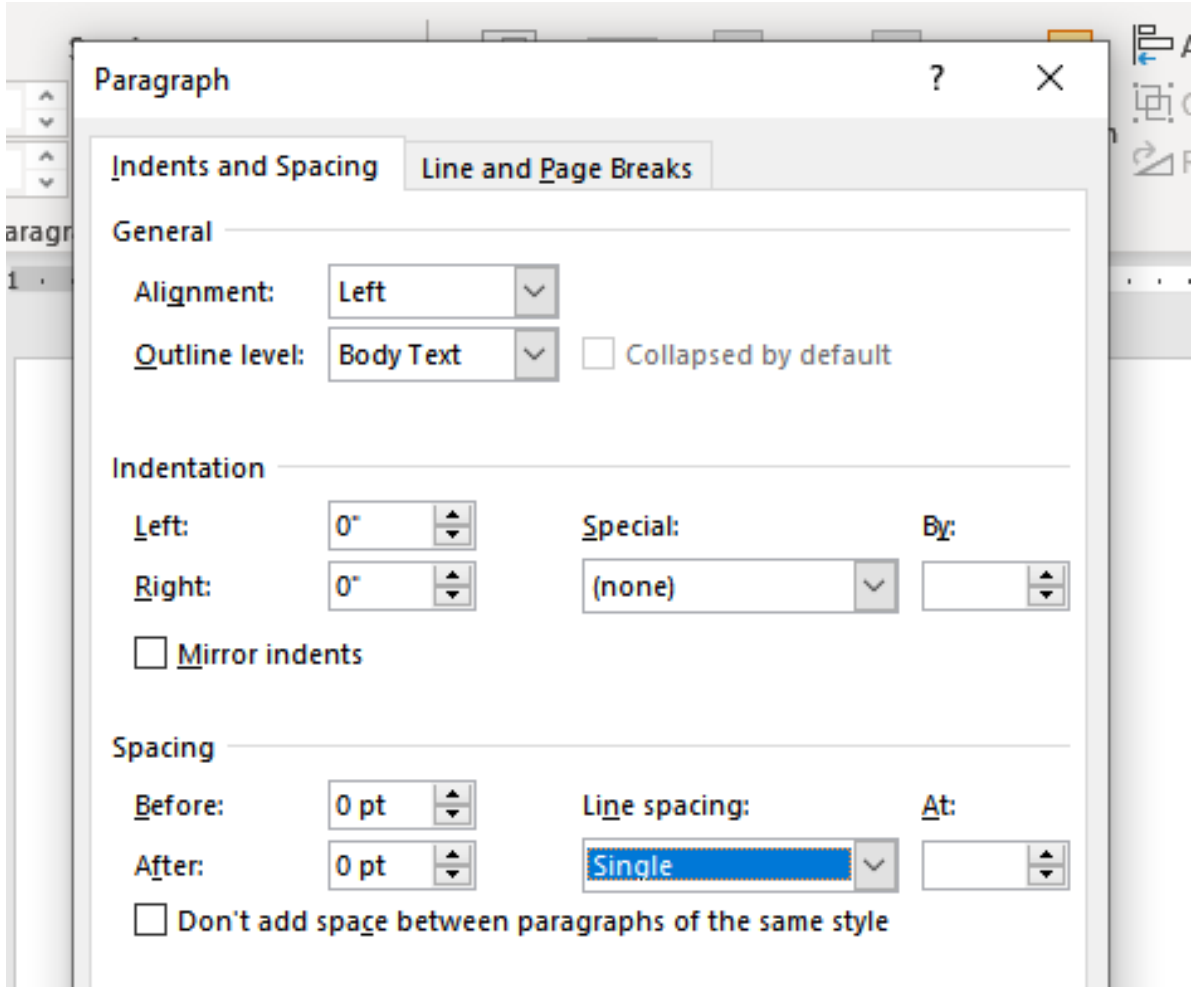
Judge may consider unacceptable (appears to be double spaced



At the top of your screen click Home Tab

Go to your Paragraph Menu

Make sure you set your spacing in the paragraph drop down



Why?...Font and Spacing

- Most contests specify 12-pt Times New Roman
- Others specify “standard font”
- All specify single space
- Why?
  - Readability
  - Minimum number of pages

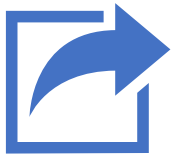
Basic Contest Submissions (part 2)

One IDed copy, one anonymous copy

On BOTH COPIES, place the contest name and number in the upper left

Note for NFSPS, both NAME and NUMBER are required

On BOTH COPIES, place the poem's title above the poem (not above the contest name)



On the IDed copy, place the poet's name in the upper right

Include all information required in the contest rules

Note that this VARIES from contest to contest, but typically is name, address, telephone number, and email

You may also be asked to include your membership status

Okay to use a return address label for IDed copy

Examples

NFSPS says double check your contest number and name…often poets don't change it if they are recycling old poems

4. Romantic Moment Prize

My Poem

Roses are red,
violets are blue.
All poets are cool –
this means you

Format for Submittable; IDed copy not needed for Submittable.

4. Romantic Moment Prize

John Q. Poet
1203 Main Street
Anytown, TN 12345
901-222-2222
jqpoet@gmail.com
Member – Poetry Society of Tennessee

My Poem

Roses are red,
violets are blue.
All poets are cool –
this means you

Basic Errors

Contest and Subject

- MUST meet the basic requirements of contest subject/topic
- “Several very nice poems were submitted to this contest, but they had nothing to do with the subject.”
- Pay attention to the contest name as well – it may indicate additional requirements
- “Note the contest title said this is a HUMOR award; very few of these poems were humorous.”

Form

- Contest entries MUST meet the minimum requirements of the form (sonnet, blank verse, villanelle, pantoum, narrative poems)
- “Most people do not seem to know what this form is, or how to write poetry in it.”
- “Do not confuse blank verse and free verse! They are not the same!”
- Typically 50% (or less) meet requirements of form
  - Do your homework
  - Get a critique

Number of lines

- Clearly stated in all contests
  - Typically max
  - Sometimes range (if range, be careful of minimum!)
  - If not stated, assume 40 lines max
- Be careful that you meet minimum line requirements to attain form
- Read rules about whether this applies to epigraphs, lines between stanzas, etc.

Monthly PST Contests

One poem per poet, per month

Follow basic ID/format requirements, above

Okay to send in a business envelope (folded)

DO NOT SEND ENTRIES FOR OTHER STATES

Submit by (mail by) 15th of each month

Identify the month and subject in the contest title

PST February Contest
"Get a Job"

My Poem

Roses are red,
violets are blue.
I'm still a working stiff –
how about you?

Packaging for PST's Annual Contest and NFSPS Why We Have Those Rules…

- 100s (PST) to 1000s (NFSPS) of entries
- Opening, checking, and sorting QUICKLY and EFFICIENTLY
- Submissions packaged same way, each time, by every entrant
- No notes, no "extras"
- Make it right, in accordance with the rules
- Mail NFSPS and state contests (like PST's Festival Contest) in large envelopes – don't fold.

NFSPS – Basics

- SEPARATE ORIGINALS (NON-IDed COPY) FROM IDed COPY
- STACK IN NUMERICAL ORDER (1-MAXIMUM CONTEST NUMBER) WITH ORIGINALS ON TOP
- COUNT BOTH PILES TO MAKE SURE ALL POEMS ARE THERE
- If you send in any other order:
  - The contest coordinator spends extra time separating your poems
  - More chances that your poems will get mixed up and not sent to the judge
- No paper clips (time, effort, and lots of paper clips).
- You can separate them with a colored sheet, a piece of cardboard, a blank sheet, etc.

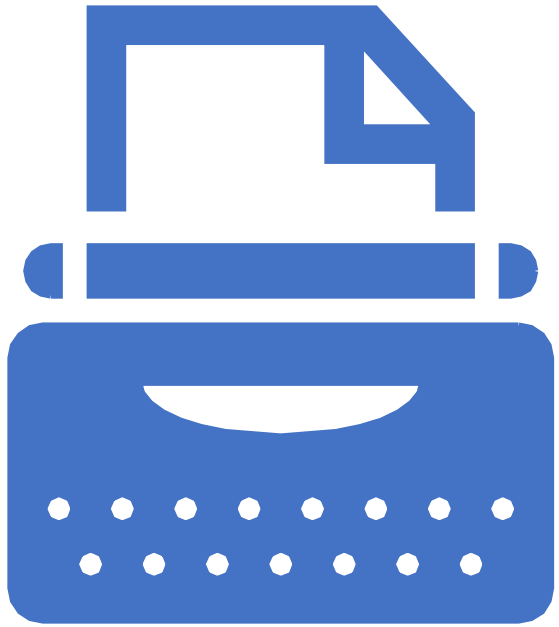
NFSPS – Basics (the file card)

- The file card is used as a "master index" of who entered and what contests you entered
- For PST, I "create" a master index on a spreadsheet as it comes in
- This is very basic, and is your ID + the contest numbers you entered
- If using Submittable, you enter this information online

John Q. Poet
1203 Main St., Anytown, TN 12345
jqpoet@gmail.com
901-222-2222
Poetry Society of Tennessee
Contests: 3, 7, 8, 11, 12, 15, 16, 20, 21, 22, 27, 29, 30, 41, 42, 45, 47, 49
Total Number of Poems: 18

NFSPS says it's a **big** problem when this index card does not match your entries. Please double and triple check it!!!

Also – make sure your check amount is correct, whether it is NFSPS or another state!



Common Mistakes

- Poems not sent in correct order
- Sending one copy of a poem, not the other
- Printing names on both copies
- Sending multiple submissions (i.e., two contest #20s)
- Submitting the same poem for multiple NFSPS contests (these must be unique entries!)
- Mistaking “submit by” and “postmarked by” dates
- Not allowing enough time for mailed copies to arrive
- Incorrect email, zip code, etc. (typo in contact info)
- Folded pages – this makes it much harder to handle/process poems

Dos and Don’ts -- Contests

- Double check your entry before sending
  - All work is in order
  - All poems have ID/non-ID copy?
  - Entry fees are correct?
  - ID is correct on every poem?
- Work is free from typos, grammatical mistakes, etc.
  - Check spelling, punctuation
  - Spell check is not infallible
  - Spell contest names/honorees right!!!
- No profanity or offensive language; language must be within contest guidelines

- Do not write notes to the contest coordinator
- Do not call/email the contest coordinator to change poems after submission
- Do not submit multiple times

Other Considerations

- Title your poems (requirement of NFSPS)
  - "People do not send their children out into the world nameless, so why send their poems out nameless?"
  - Very few poems DO NOT have titles (e.g., haiku)
- Do not include graphics UNLESS they are part of the form (e.g., tanka art, eye poem)
  - If it is part of the form, make sure form is CLEARLY STATED
  - NFSPS does not accept ANY illustrations…MAKE SURE ART IS ACCEPTED IN THE CONTEST
- Do not ever put more than one poem on a page

Other Considerations

- Do not do simultaneous submissions
  - NFSPS is very clear about this
  - I have worked with other states who have had problems concurrent with PST's contest
- You will either need to retract a winning poem (causing an administrative headache) OR
- The contest administrator will demote your poem to an HM or lower, so as not to deal with the headache

Other Considerations

- Poems must be UNPUBLISHED IN ANY FORM
  - INCLUDING ELECTRONICALLY AND/OR PLACED ON EXHIBITION
  - NFSPS publishes everything winning more than $15
- Be aware of publication rights for the contests you are entering, and where you have won (Keep a log? Write on each poem?)
  - NFSPS rights revert back to poet after publication of Encore
  - PST rights revert back to poet after publication of Tennessee Voices
  - Other societies/publications may be different

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN??? The poet does not have the right to read your poem in a public forum (e.g., a public reading, on the radio), submit to another contest, or publish his/her poem elsewhere, until rights revert back.

Other Considerations

- Stay within the theme of the contest
  - Don’t submit any/any to a subject/theme-specific contest
  - If it seems like a stretch to make it fit, then it probably is
  - If it can’t be tied closer to the subject with a revision, an epigraph, or a footnote, then don’t submit

Other Considerations

- Remember your judge is going to react to your poetry and your content
  - Russell always advises for political contests that you avoid taking an extreme political stance (i.e., extreme right or extreme left) – you don't know who your judge will be, or how they will react
  - Same with any other topic which you are passionate about (religion, the environment, civil rights) – while it may be a great poem, and you may still choose to submit, understand that the judge may not have the same emotional response
  - Obtain critiques get feedback; see how others are interacting/ responding to the same subject material