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Every Course You Will Ever Take

Paper Layout Guidelines

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Paper Layout Guidelines

Writing an essay is like driving a car. Plenty of people know *how* to do it, but few do it well, and even fewer follow all the rules. But, have no fear. With this guide you'll have your papers looking just like they should so your teacher can focus on what you wrote rather than commenting on the margins and header of the essay *that you stayed up until 2 writing and the printer wouldn't print right, which is stupid because the format doesn't matter because the thing is turned in and I followed all the other directions...*

I feel your pain. Really. Here's the problem, though: It looks fine when you have only one essay (yours) in front of you, but your teacher takes around 20 home to grade at a time. Suddenly your choice of **Comic Sans** (to make it seem happier), `Courier New` (to make it longer) or (shudder) `Papyrus` (because you like ugly things) stands out like a sore thumb. It makes the teacher think one of a few things:

1. The student didn't read the directions (rarely a good idea).
2. The student thinks I'm an idiot (OH WOW! *Five pages?! What a great font, too!!!one!!* I'm not even going to read it! A+!).
3. The student spent more time playing with fonts than writing the essay.

None (or all) of these things may be true, but that doesn't matter. You have damaged your credibility before the essay is even read. Even if "Formatting" isn't a part of your grade, you've lost points because the teacher is thinking one of the three things above. It sucks, but appearance

matters. Make your paper *look* like an A essay, even if you're worried about the content; your grade will reflect it.

So, how do you do it? Simple: change the template in your word processing program. This will eliminate 85% of the problems you are having with formatting. (This guide is for MS Word, but you should be able to adapt it to any other program. If you want instructions for Pages, purchase a Mac for me and I'll do your template for you.)

Step One: Open a blank document. Set the font to "Times New Roman" and the size to "12." Do not touch these settings—ever.

Step Two: Adjust the margins. Most word processors default to 1.25", but MLA standards are 1" all around. To fix this, choose your version:

Word 97 and earlier: Go to "File" and "Page Setup." Select the "Margins" tab, and make sure the Top, Bottom, Left, and Right all say 1", Header and Footer at 0.5".

Word 2004/2010: Go to the "Page Layout" tab then select "Margins." From the drop-down menu, select 1" all around.

You can also use the ruler bars to do this, but make sure you are sliding the grey area and not the indent markers.

Step Three: Adjust the paragraph spacing. MLA standards are double line spacing, with no space before or after the paragraph. Again, choose your version to find the options box then follow the directions below.

Word 97 and earlier: Select "Format" then "Paragraph."


Word 2004/2010: Go to the "Paragraph" section in the middle of the "Home" tab. Click the little arrow in the bottom right corner.


Both: Select the "Indents and Spacing" tab. In the "Spacing" section, the "Before" box should read "0 pt" (not "Auto"). Same with the "After" box. The "Line Spacing" menu to the left should say "Double."

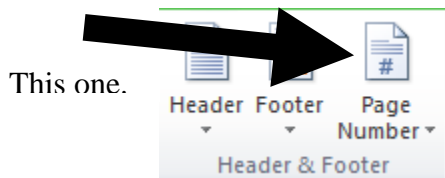
Step Four: Create your document header (your last name and the page number). This is the one that gets everyone, so I've included pictures for your benefit. I know, I'm awesome.

Word 97 and earlier: Go to "View" then "Header and Footer." A little bar should pop up that looks like this:



Align your text to the right with this button: . Type your last name, then space once. Click on the number sign (I put a star around it, above). Hit the "Close" button on the right of the bar.

Word 2004/2010: Double-click the top of your page. A dotted line should appear, marking the header, and a green "Header and Footer" tab should appear at the top of the window. Move your text to the right of the header with this button under the "Home" tab: . Type your last name and a space. Then go to the "Header and Footer" tab and click on the "Page Number" dropdown box. (See pic, below left.)



Choose "Current Position" and "Plain Number." (Why does it take so long for that list to load? Luckily, you'll only have to do this once.) Double-click the body of your doc to pop out of the header.

Step Five: The (other) header. We'll call this the "document header." Notice that we aren't in the special header above the document anymore? Your assignment information doesn't go there, otherwise it would appear on every page. And that would look silly.

Make sure your cursor (that little blinky thing that spits out letters as you type) is on the left of your page. Now double-check. Really. Now type your name, first then last. Stop. Look at the top of this document. Does it look like mine? Good. *Your document header should never be on the right side. Ever. Everrrr. Evah.* Hit "Enter," then type "Class Name." (This is a template, so you'll re-use it for all kinds of classes.) Hit "Enter" again and type "Assignment Name." For future reference, this is what your teacher calls it. The

name of *your* document goes in the title area. We're almost there. Hit "Enter" a fourth time and type "Date Turned In."

Step Six: The title. Hit "Enter," from the "Date Turned In" line then move the blinky thing to the middle of the line. (Use the ≡ button.) Type "Title." Do not underline, embolden, italicize, embiggen, or otherwise alter this title.

Step Seven: Sample text. Hit "Enter" *once* after your title, then move your cursor to the left. Press "Tab" once to indent. (Do not use the four space thing—the only people who still do that still call the "Enter" button the "Carriage Return." Ask the oldest person you know.) Type a few inspirational lines to yourself or a letter of eternal thanks to me. Stick a sample quotation in there, too: "Do not underline, embolden, italicize, embiggen, or otherwise alter this title" (Stallings 4). Notice the position of the period? The lack of "p's" "pg's" or any other word beyond the author's last name? All citations should look like that.

Step Seven: Your Works Cited. This is Big League stuff, but if you've followed all my directions (and your paper looks just like the top of my first page), I think you're ready for it. Press "Enter" once after your letter to me, then press "Ctrl" and "Enter." This will pop you onto the next page. (Never again will you have to press "Enter" a million times to start your Works Cited page, only to have it print in the middle of your last page. Move the cursor to the middle of the page (cry silently to yourself as you read over Step Six if you can't remember how to do this) and type "Works Cited." Press "Enter" and move the cursor to the left.

Step Eight: Your citations. Head over to owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/ then copy and paste that into your page (don't forget to remove it before you turn it in, though). You'll always have a great resource when it comes time to write a citation.


The pesky thing about citations is that they require what's called a "hanging indent." The paragraph above has one. With a hanging indent, rather than moving the first line in, all the lines are moved in, leaving the first right against the margin. (Check out my handout on citations [if I ever get around to making it] for an in-depth explanation of why this

makes sense. Right now, you'll just have to trust me. I haven't steered you wrong yet, have I?

Type in the following *exactly* as written:

Stallings, Jesse. "Layout Guidelines." *The Impossibly Heartwarming Guide to English Papers*. New York: Chuck Norris Publishers, 2010.

Did you get the second line to move in? Did you move the little sliders up top? Fine. Did you use spaces? Lame. I'll show you a better way:

All versions: After typing the above, find the little hourglass shape on the ruler at the top of the document. It should look like this: . This controls the indentations in the current text (that is, fiddling with this will only affect the paragraph with your cursor in it, or any selected text). There are three buttons there. The bottom rectangle moves the whole paragraph, the middle one (looks like a house) moves all the lines after the first, and the top one moves the first line of the paragraph. To do a hanging indent, snag the middle slider and drag it over 1/2". It should look like this:



Does your citation look like the above? You'll need to do this for each citation, or just type them all, select them, and do it once.

Step Nine: Saving the template. *Clap* *clap* *clap.* Well done; you're almost there. In the final step, you'll save this file as a template so each essay you write will be perfectly formatted.

Go to the "File" menu, click "Save As." In the drop-down box under the file name (the "Save as type" box), select "Document Template (*.dot)" (If using Word 04 or later, choose *.dotx.) Name the template whatever you'd like; I'd suggest something unforgettable, like "Stallings," but it should be clear what it's for, so maybe "Stallings Essay," but that might be confusing. "MLA Template" will do. Save it in the "Templates" folder (usually under "Program Files," "Microsoft Templates" and a sub-folder with a number. Just dig until you find a lot of other template files.

Step Ten: DONE! To open the template, open Word, select “File” and “New,” then choose your template.

It’s just that easy... The 20 minutes you spent working through this will save you countless hours when trying to track down the proper MLA guidelines, and if you save the template file, you’ll be able to use it on into college (as long as the MLA doesn’t change their guidelines).