Formatting a Word Document for an Research Paper in MLA Style

Note: This document demonstrates Word 2013. Formatting is the same in earlier versions of Word, but some of the locations of the functions are different.

**View:** To make the document on your screen look like the document that will print, go to the “View” tab and select “Print Layout.” Use “Zoom” to make the view of the document a comfortable size for you – usually 100% or Page Width. These settings make it easier to work, but do not affect the appearance of your final document.

**General guidelines:**

- Wherever possible, let the formatting features of Word control the appearance of your document. Formatting this way makes it much easier to deal with any changes to your document.
- Only click the <Enter> key at the end of a paragraph, title or citation. Do not hit <Enter> at the end of each line of text.
- If you have already created your paper, you can apply most of these settings after the fact by highlighting the area you want to change, then changing the formatting.
- By default, all the settings you select will be saved with your document, but they will not change the default settings. This means that when you save your document and reopen it, all of the formatting settings will be the way you set them. However, if you open a new document, the new document will have the default settings. To change your default settings to MLA style, select “set as default” as you make formatting changes to your document; this is illustrated in these instructions in the Page Setup and Margin sections.

**PART 1. Overall Formatting of the document**

**Go to the Page Layout Tab**

1. **In the Page Setup section,** verify that the following settings are in place:
   - page orientation is on "Portrait"
   - size of your paper is "Letter"
   - columns are “one”
   - hyphenation is “none”
2. **Margins – Set to “Normal”** which is 1 inch on Top, Left, Bottom, and Right. If you want to change the default setting for margins, expand the Page Setup options, verify that all margins are 1”, then click “Set as Default.” (See image below).

3. Go to the “Home” tab to set font to Times New Roman or Arial and size 12.
   - DO NOT select Bold, Italics, and Underline.
   - Verify that the font color is black. (“Automatic” is black by default. That is fine also.)
4. **Paragraph settings can be found on the Home or Page Layout tabs.** Expand the Paragraph settings options then set **left alignment, first line indentation, no spacing before and after paragraphs, and double spacing,** like this:

- **Expand Paragraph options**
- **Left align**
- **0.5” Left indentation**
- **First Line indent by 0.5”**
- **Spacing before and after paragraphs 0**
- **Line Spacing: Double**

Optional: “Set as Default” to apply settings to new

“OK” when you’re done.
Part II. Header and page number

1. There are two ways to go to the header. Either option will open the Header Tools on the Ribbon.
   - Method 1: Double click at in the top 1” of the page, where the header would be.
   - Method 2: Go to the Insert Tab and select “Header.”

2. Select a “blank” header, like this:

3. Type your **last name (or other desired header text).** Hit the space bar to create one space, then **click on page number.** Select “Current position” and “Plain number.” (Don’t worry if it’s on the left side of the page.) Page numbering is automatic, so don’t type the page number.
4. With the header still selected, click on the “Home” tab, then click “Right align” in the paragraph section.

5. Close the Header tools by double clicking in the document or selecting the Header Dialogue box and clicking “Close the Header and Footer.”

The end result will look like this:

Special Header Notes

If you do not want the page number on the first page of your document, open the Header Tool (double click on header area) and check “Different first page.” Now you will need to format the first page separately from the other pages. If you don’t want a header on your first page, just highlight any text in the header and delete it. Go to any page that is not the first page to format the header for the remaining pages.
If you want to start page numbering other than page 1. (This might be the case if you have a title page, and you want the next page to be page 1.) Open the header tool and pull down the page number options. Select “Format page numbers.” Under “Page numbering,” adjust the starting number. Choose “0” if you want page 1 to be the page after the title page.

Part II. Beginning your paper.

On the first page of your paper, list the following, hitting the <Enter> key after each line. Of course you will make any modifications your instructor requires.

• Your name
• Your instructor’s name
• The class
• The date

The end result will look like this:

Jaggy Jaguar
Professor Awesome
ENGL 1101
September 9, 2015
Format your **title on the next line** (no extra spacing after the date) follows:

- Capitalize the first letter of the first and last words of the title.
- Capitalize the first letter of all other words in the title EXCEPT a, an, the, short conjunctions and prepositions (For example the words *and, to, with, of*) and other short words following MLA style guidelines.
- Italicize and use quotation marks following the same rules as you would in the body of the paper. For example, italicize the name of a book and put quotation marks around the title of a short story, poem, or article.
- Do not use all capital letters, larger font, bold, or any other font formatting for your title that is different from the rest of the document.
- If you have a subtitle, put a semicolon after the first part of the title. Capitalize the first word of the Subtitle.
- While your cursor is on the same line as the title, **center your title** by going to the Home tab and selecting “center,” like this:

  ![Click to center title.](image)

  ![Click to return to left alignment.](image)

- Click the <Enter> key after your title and return the paragraph alignment to left alignment.

Here is an example of a title with a subtitle that includes a book title and short story title::

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Enclosed Spaces: A Comparison of the Settings in *Jane Eyre* and “The Yellow Wallpaper”
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### Part III The body of your paper.

1. Make sure that your **paragraph settings are left alignment and first line indent.**
2. Type the text of your paper, hitting the <Enter> key after each paragraph. The paragraphs should automatically indent by ½ inch.

**If you need to create a block quote**, type the quote.

- Highlight the text you want to indent.
- On the Home tab, in the paragraph section, click the “Increase indent” button twice to indent the paragraph 1 inch.
- Remove the first line indent by putting the cursor before the first word and click the <Backspace> key. You may also remove the indent by expanding the paragraph options and changing “first line” to “none.”
- When you are done, click somewhere else on the page to deselect (unhighlight) the block quote.
- See MLA style guidelines for when to use a block quote, when to use quotations, when to indent the quote, and how to incorporate citing the quote.
(This sample quote is from *Jane Eyre*, by Charlotte Bronte.)

Part IV Formatting Works Cited

1. **Start a new page.** Works cited always starts on a new page, so when you get to the end of your paper, go to the “Insert” tab and select “Page Break.”

2. **Title the page “Works Cited,”** centering the title as you did with the title of your paper.

3. Open the paragraph options box and return the paragraph formatting to **left alignment.**

4. Change your **indentation to “Hanging.”**
5. Create your citation following MLA rules. Only hit <Enter> after you have finished that citation. Then go on to the next citation.

6. Your list of Works Cited should be in alphabetical order. If it is not, you can fix it like this:
   a. Highlight the citations. (Not the part that says “Works Cited.”)
   b. In the paragraph formatting section of the “Home” click on the “Sort” button (it looks like A-Z)


Select “Sort by Paragraphs” and Ascending, as shown. Select “No header row.”

When you click “OK”, as if by magic, your works cited is now in almost perfect alphabetical order!

**WARNING:** This sorting function is NOT perfect. When alphabetizing, you should ignore any initial punctuation marks and the words *a*, *an*, and *the* at the beginning of a title. So if you have any of those exceptions, you will need to move them to the correct location.

To manually move a citation, highlight the citation you want to move and then click (hold) and drag it to the proper location. You might need to fix some of the formatting if it didn't land in exactly the right spot. You could also cut and paste it into the right location.

You should now be done! Be sure to save your masterpiece and proofread your paper before you turn it in!

**More about MLA Style**
Use these websites for guidance about MLA Style formatting.

- GPC Libraries’ Cite your Sources page (includes English Dept. handouts)  http://depts.gpc.edu/library/citations.html
- GPC Learning and Tutoring Center writing handouts  http://depts.gpc.edu/~gpcltc/commhandouts.htm
- Purdue OWL (Online Writing Lab)  https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/
Using the built-in MLA template in Word 2013

- When you open a new document, you will be given the option to choose a template.
- Search for “MLA”
- Then select “MLA style research paper” and click “Create.”
- The default font is Calibri; highlight all (Ctrl + A) and change the font to Times New Roman or Arial, if needed.

The resulting document will already be formatted in MLA style. The text gives you additional hints about how to format your document. You can just delete the parts you don’t need. The downside to using templates is that they can be difficult to adjust if you’re not adept at using Word.

To use the template, select a section with your cursor and type the information in the appropriate spot.

If there’s a part of the template you don’t need, select it and delete it.