

If you want an A, learn MLA!

A guide to formatting your paper

Why MLA?

The short answer: Your professor chose it.

The long answer: MLA format is likely the default format of any upper academic essay. Aside from the sciences, MLA format serves as a useful format to cover a range of subjects. It features the key elements within its format that make essays easier to read and information easier to find.

Before you begin writing:

Microsoft Word is user friendly, but that doesn't mean it doesn't have tricks. Be sure to follow these steps **before** you begin writing the content of your essay. Attempting to format your essay after writing it can result in inconsistent and therefore incorrect formatting.

*If your essay has already been typed out, make sure to highlight all of the text, header included, and follow the steps for general formatting below.

Disclaimer: This guide is formatted to Microsoft Word 2013. Newer or older versions of Microsoft Word will have the same or similar formatting options, but they may not appear in the same places described or shown in this guide.

General Formatting:

- ✓ Open Microsoft Word and click "Create" on the left hand side to form a new document.
- ✓ Locate the "Home" tab in the dashboard at the top of the page.
- ✓ Click the drop down arrow of the font box and select "Times New Roman." See *Figure 1*.
- ✓ Change the font size to 12. See *Figure 1*.
- ✓ Next to the font and size boxes is a section labelled "Paragraph." In the bottom right corner is a small arrow. Click the arrow to access the Paragraph settings. See *Figure 2*.
- ✓ This can also be achieved by right clicking anywhere on the document and selecting "Paragraph." A window will pop up.
- ✓ Under the line spacing option, select "Double." See *Figure 3*.
- ✓ Underneath that, checkmark the box next to "Don't add space between paragraphs of the same style." Make sure the box displays a checkmark and not a filled in black box. See *Figure 3*.

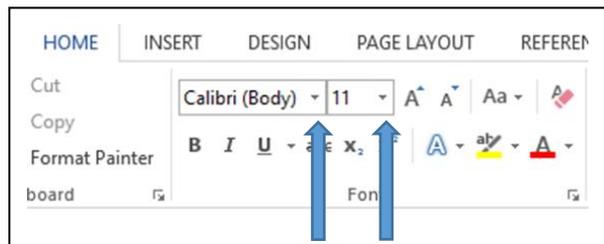


Figure 1



Figure 2

- ✓ Click “Okay” to close the window or press Enter.
- ✓ Your margins should be aligned correctly automatically, but to check and make sure, click the “Page Layout” tab.
- ✓ On the left side, press the “Margins” button.
- ✓ The margins should be set to “Normal” which means there is 1 inch on the top, bottom, left, and right margins.
- ✓ If not, click the “Custom Margins” option at the bottom of the list.
- ✓ Use the arrows, or type the number “1” into the Top, Bottom, Left, and Right boxes.
- ✓ Click “Okay” to close the window or press Enter.

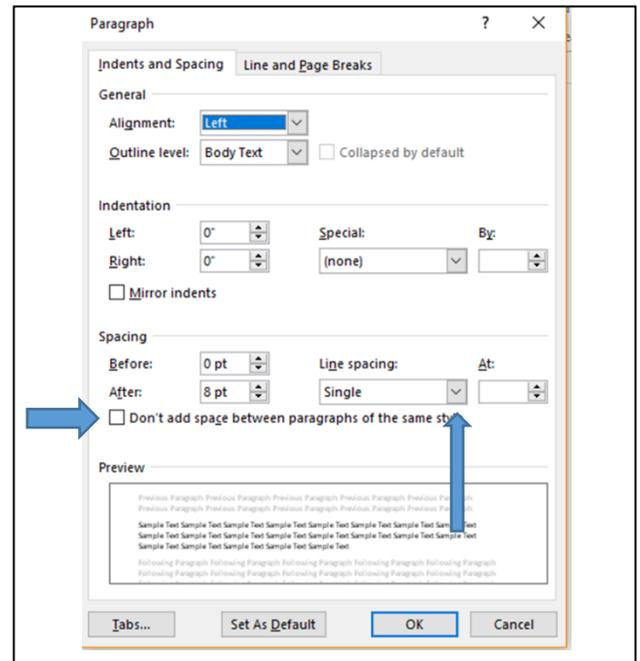


Figure 3

The Heading:

- ✓ Your cursor should be aligned to the upper left hand side.
- ✓ First, type your first and last name.
- ✓ Press Enter.
- ✓ Type the name of your instructor with the prefix “Dr., Mr., or Ms.” in front of it.
- ✓ Press Enter.
- ✓ Type the title of the course the essay is for with the class number if applicable.
- ✓ Press Enter.
- ✓ Type the date the assignment is due in the format Day Month Year.
- ✓ Press Enter.
- ✓ See *Figure 4* for an example heading.

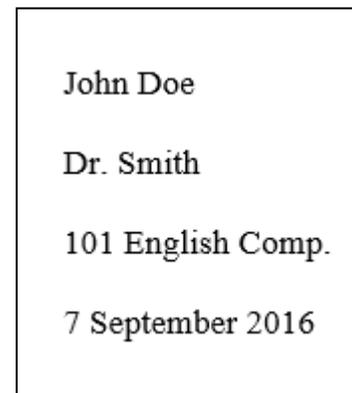


Figure 4

The Title:

- ✓ Your cursor should be a row beneath your essay due date.
- ✓ To center your title, click the centered line icon in the Paragraph section on the dashboard. See *Figure 5*.
- ✓ Type in your title name, or a placemaker “Title” if you have yet to decide a title.



Figure 5

- ✓ Press Enter.
- ✓ Return your cursor to left align by clicking the left line icons above in the dashboard.

Page Numbers:

- ✓ On the dashboard, select the tab “Insert” next to the tab “Home”
- ✓ Under the Header & Footer section, there will be a Page Number option.
- ✓ Click the drop-down arrow to select your page numbers.
- ✓ Hover over the “Top of Page” to display options.
- ✓ Select “Plain Number 3” See *Figure 6*.
- ✓ The numbers will appear in the right corner of your paper.
- ✓ Click on the space right in front of the number.
- ✓ Type your last name and a space. It should look like this: Smith 1.
- ✓ Highlight both the last name and the number.
- ✓ Click the “Home” tab.
- ✓ Change your font to Times New Roman and size to 12.
- ✓ Click “Close Header Footer” in the Design tab.

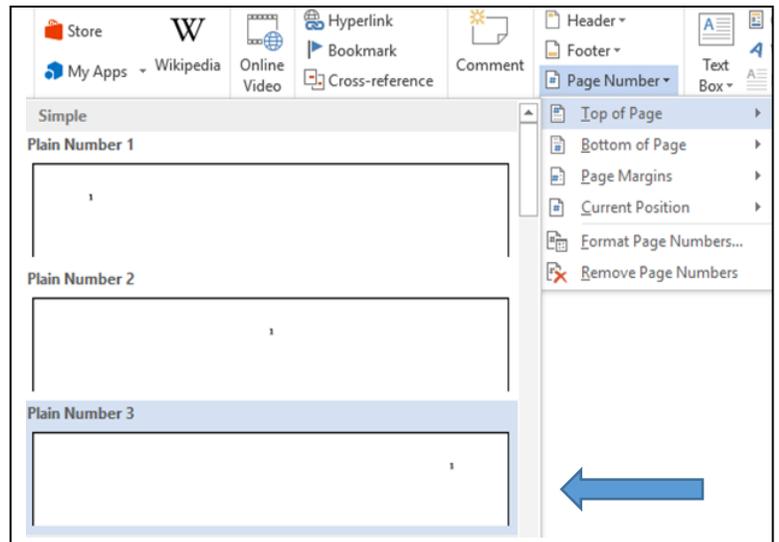


Figure 6

Don't worry, finishing the header and title is the hardest part. You're almost there!

The Essay:

- ✓ Be sure your cursor is beneath your heading and title on the left hand side.
- ✓ Press tab once.
- ✓ Begin typing your glorious essay.

Tip: Each new paragraph should have the first line tabbed once. Only press enter once between paragraphs, there should no more space between paragraphs.

Works Cited:

- ✓ Before beginning your Works Cited page, be sure that you are starting on a new page at the end of your documents.
- ✓ Under the “Home” tab, select the centered line icon in the Paragraph section.
- ✓ Type the words “Works Cited” and press enter.

Tip: Start a new page by clicking “Page Break” on the far left side of the “Insert” tab.

- ✓ Select the left aligned line icon to return the cursor to the left side.
- ✓ Type or copy/paste your first citation into the paper.
- ✓ Once your citation(s) have been typed, highlight *all* the citations. Do *not* highlight the Works Cited heading.
- ✓ Access the Paragraph window by either clicking the arrow icon on the dashboard or right-clicking and selecting “Paragraph.”
- ✓ Click the drop-down arrow of the box under “Special.”
- ✓ Select the option “Hanging.”
- ✓ Click “Okay” to close the window or press Enter.
- ✓ Congrats! This was the last step. You made it.

Tip: Citations should be listed in alphabetical order by the word that first appears in the citation. Need more help citing? Visit the Purdue OWL website or visit the Writing Center!

Tip: When pasting outside text into your essay, pay attention to the paste options. In some versions of Microsoft, there are 3 different options under Paste. To keep formatting correct, select the far right option “Keep text only.”

Frequently Asked Questions:

[I have gone into my essay and added or removed text, will this affect my format?](#)

It could. If your essay already includes a Works Cited page at the end, adding or removing text will shift the positioning of that page. Simply place your cursor above the Works Cited heading and either press Enter or Backspace until your header is again at the top of a new page.

[All my page numbers are the same, how do I fix this?](#)

If all your page numbers are the same, this likely means you manually inserted a number into a header. To fix this, click in your header to edit it and delete the previous number and header. Be sure to click insert “Page Number” instead of “Header” and then follow the page number steps above.

[My page numbers start on the wrong page, what is wrong?](#)

Your page number starting point is off. Click in your header and highlight your page number. Right click on the highlighted page number. Choose the “Page Number Format” option. If it isn’t selected, click the bubble next to “Start at:” and then use the arrows beside it to choose “1.” Click “Okay” to close the window.

[How do I know what format to write my paper in?](#)

In general, MLA is the go-to format for most academic papers. Unless it has otherwise been specified by your instructor to use APA format, Chicago style, or a format they’ve described, it is safe to assume and present your essay in MLA format.