



Formatting College Papers *...easily*

This is a step-by-step guide to formatting college papers in Microsoft (MS) Word. In most cases, college professors require papers to be set up according to specifications defined by the Modern Language Association (MLA) or the American Psychological Association (APA). Creating the correct format in MSWord can be challenging for people who are new to either the style requirements or MS Word. This guide is intended to help you navigate through MS Word in order to format a college paper properly to meet MLA and APA requirements.

Opening MS Word

- In the bottom left-hand corner of your computer screen, click on “Start.”
- In the new window, click on “All programs ►.”
- In the drop-down menu, click on “Microsoft Office.”
- In the new drop-down menu, click on “Microsoft Word.”

A large, new window filling the screen will open with a blank MS Word document ready to go.

Basic Formatting

Before you even start to type your text, complete the following steps.

Select a Font & Size

- Click on the “Home” tab at the top of the window.
- Just beneath it, in the “Font” section, a box contains a font name. Click on the “▼” next to it.
- The drop-down menu contains names of all available fonts; click on “Times New Roman.”
- Next to the box with the font name is another box with a number in it. Click on the “▼” next to it; then click on 11 or 12.

Line Spacing

- In the “Paragraph” section, hover over any symbol; a grey box appears to tell you what it means. In the center of the row, click on “Line and Paragraph Spacing.”
- In the drop-down menu, move your mouse over the list of numbers (1.0, 1.15, etc.); click on “2.0” (double-spacing).
- Click on the “Line and Paragraph Spacing” symbol again. Note at the bottom of the drop-down menu “Add space before paragraph” and “Add space after paragraph.” If either of these says “Remove,” click on it to change it to “Add.”

Page Margins

- Above the tool bar, click on the “Page Layout” tab.
- In the “Page Setup” section, click on the “▼” next to the word “Margins”.
- In the drop-down menu, click on “Normal” (this should be one inch all around).

Advanced Formatting

So far, everything you have done is the same for both MLA and APA formatting. From this point on, these instructions are divided into MLA and APA sections. Depending on which format you are directed to use by your professor, follow the instructions in the appropriate section and disregard the other.

MLA Page Numbering

- Click the “Insert” tab atop the tool bar.
- In the section called “Header & Footer,” click on “Page Number.”
- In the drop-down menu, click on “Top of page.”
- In the new window, click on “Plain Number 3.”
- Your blank document will change. The top part is divided by a dotted line with a little tab hanging down from it on the extreme left called “Header” and a blinking cursor to the immediate left of the page number in the upper right-hand corner. Type your last name and then two spaces, before the page number.
- Click on the red “X” button labeled “Close Header & Footer.” Your blank Word document returns to normal, and your name and page number appear in the upper right-hand corner. The page number will automatically change as you type your text onto each page that follows.

APA Page Numbering

The process for page numbering in APA format is similar to MLA. Follow instructions for MLA Page Numbering up to the point where you have the blinking cursor to the left of the page number and are instructed to type in your name. APA requires what is called a “Running Head” instead of your name.

- Type in the first three or four primary words of your paper’s title. For example, if your paper’s title is “Adhesion Modulating Properties of Tenascin-W”, type “Adhesion Modulating Properties.”

• If your professor requires page numbering to start on the first page of text and not the title page, you need to revisit

the “Page Number” drop-down menu in the “Header & Footer” section of your tool bar.

- Click on “Format Page Numbers.”
- In the new window, below the blue heading “Page Numbering”, click on the little circle next to “Start at:” Change the number from “1” to “2.” This means your page numbering will begin on the second page of your document, and the title page will remain numberless.
- Click “OK.”
- Click on the red “X” button labeled “Close Header & Footer.” Your blank Word document returns to normal and your Running Head and page number appear in the upper right-hand corner. The page number will automatically change as you type your text onto each page that follows. If you completed the highlighted section above, there will be nothing on the title page, but if you hit the “Return” key until the next page scrolls up, you will see “Your Running Head 1” at the top.

MLA Title Page Formatting

- On the top line of your first page, type your full name and hit the “Enter” key.
- On the second line, type the name of your professor (e.g. [such as], “Professor Einstein”).
- On the third line, type in the name of your class (e.g., English 101”).
- On the fourth line, type the date of your paper (usually the due date).
- On the fifth line, type the title of your paper. Do not use quotation marks or underline the title, nor should you use a bold or italicized font. Each major word in your title should be capitalized (e.g., “The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire”).
- Now, highlight the title of your paper by positioning your mouse at the beginning of it and clicking three times fast. The entire title will be highlighted in blue.
- Click on the “Home” tab above your tool bar.
- In the “Paragraph” section, of the four similar symbols grouped together on the left of the bottom row, click on the “Center” symbol. Your title suddenly shifts from the left margin to the center of the page, while your name and other information remain on the left margin.
- Press the “Enter” key to drop down to a new line where you will begin typing your text.
- As the only line on the page that should be centered is your title, you now need to reset your alignment. Return to the “Paragraph” section of your tool bar and click on “Align Text Left”. Your blinking cursor will move from the center of the page to the left margin, and you are now ready to begin typing your text.

APA Title Page Formatting

- On the very first line of text, type in “Running Head:” followed by a space and the same words you used for the Running Head when you set your page numbering.
- Press the “Enter” key a few times to move the cursor down to roughly the middle of the page.
- As the following several lines will need to be centered on the page, you now need to reset the alignment. In the “Paragraph” section of the tool bar, of the four similar symbols grouped together on the left of the bottom row, click on the “Center” symbol. You will notice that the blinking cursor suddenly shifts from the left margin to the center of the page.
- Now, type the full title of your paper. Each major word in your title should be capitalized (e.g., “The Clinical Trial of a Mood-Enhancing Dietary Supplement”). If your title is long, it may require two lines. Hit the “Enter” key after each new line.
- On the next line, type your full name.
- On the next, the name of your college.

Make sure you consult your course syllabus or assignment rubric as some professors require the date of the paper or the course name and number. If no additional information is required, APA formatting of the title page requires only your paper’s title, your name, and the name of your college.

- Press the “Enter” key until the cursor moves down to a new page. You will notice that your pre-set Running Head in the upper right-hand corner is followed by the number “2.” If your professor requires that you omit page numbering on the title page, the page number on the new page should be “1.” If it is not, back-track to the shaded portion of the “APA Page Numbering” section of these instructions and reset your page numbering format.

Paragraph Indentation

- Type your first paragraph of text WITHOUT an indentation.
- Highlight the entire paragraph by placing the mouse at the beginning of it and clicking three times in succession; the entire paragraph will be highlighted.
- Click on the “Page Layout” tab above your tool bar.
- In the bottom right-hand corner of the “Paragraph” section, click on “First Line.” The “By:” box to the right will automatically set to .5” (half of an inch).
- Click “OK.” You will now notice that the first line of your paragraph has been indented while the rest remains aligned on the left margin. From now on, every time you type a paragraph and press the “Enter” key, a new paragraph will begin with an indented first line.