How to Prepare MLA-Formatted Documents Using Microsoft Word

In their printed presentation, every paper submitted for a grade in Liberal Arts courses should look exactly the same. This PDF mini-manual includes a series of simple procedures that will transform your text into a properly formatted MLA Style document using Microsoft Word. Note: It may be necessary to zoom in on some of the graphics in the electronic version to see how these operations are performed.

01 MARGINS

WHAT: Set the MARGINS of your page at 1 inch on all sides.

HOW: Select the “Page Layout” tab in the toolbar; click on the pop-up button in the bottom right-hand corner of the tab, at which point a dialogue box will appear; click on the “Margins” tab and key the numeral 1 into the “Top,” “Bottom,” “Left,” and “Right” boxes. Note: By clicking on “Default” after performing this operation, you will not need to repeat this step every time you open a new file. While you’re at it, click on the “Layout” tab and make sure that your “Header” and “Footer” measurements are set at 0.5 inches—this will come in handy later. (Note: Disregard the line and paragraph numbers included in the left margin of the sample text reproduced below.)

FIGURE 01
02 FONT & FONT SIZE

WHAT: Use 12-point Times New Roman (TNR) for all MLA Style texts. (The only exception is the Footer, which should be set in 10-point TNR bold).

HOW: Select the “Home” tab in the toolbar; click on the pop-up button in the bottom right-hand corner of the “Font” tab, at which point a dialogue box will appear; set the font and font size. Or, simply select the full text (Ctrl + A) and then right-click the mouse—the same dialogue box seen below appears. Note: All defaults related to font, font size, paragraph tabs, and line spacing can be set using this simple procedure. (Note: Disregard the line and paragraph numbers included in the left margin of the sample text reproduced below.)

FIGURE 02
03 LINE SPACING

WHAT: DOUBLE-SPACE the lines of the full text. Note: There should be no additional line spaces between the heading information, titles, or paragraphs.

HOW: Before or after the text has been keyed in, highlight the full body of your text (Ctrl + A), click on “Format” in the toolbar, and scroll down and click on “Paragraphs”; a dialogue box will appear; set “Line spacing” at “Double” and click on “OK.” Note: The TABS default can also be set at this time. (Note: Disregard the line and paragraph numbers included in the left margin of the sample text reproduced below.)

FIGURE 03
**O3 TABS**

**WHAT:** MLA Style tabs should be set to 0.35 inches, which will control the space between each left margin at the indentation of each paragraph. *Note:* Once you’ve tabbed the first paragraph of your text, each successive paragraph break will be tabbed automatically.

**HOW:** Setting the tabs in MS Word 2007 takes a few steps, unless the default has been previously set (see “Line Spacing” above). *(Note: Disregard the line and paragraph numbers included in the left margin of the sample text reproduced below.)*

**STEP 1:** Select the “Page Layout” tab in the toolbar; next, click on the pop-up button in the bottom right-hand corner of the “Paragraph” tab, at which point a dialogue box will appear.

**FIGURE 03A (STEP 1)**

**STEP 2:** Click the “Tabs” button in the bottom left-hand corner; next, click on “Clear All” to remove any previous defaults; and then, key in 0.35 into the “Default Tab Stops” box; click “OK.”

**FIGURE 03B (STEP 2)**
04 HEADING INFORMATION, TEXT ALIGNMENT, & TITLES

WHAT: The heading information for every paper submitted in Liberal Arts course should be up-to-date and properly formatted for each separate draft.

HOW: Key in the following HEADING INFORMATION into the first four lines of your double-spaced text: (1) your first and last name; (2) “Prof. Stamps” [or your other professor’s name]; (3) “English 1101” [or whatever the current class and course number happens to be]; and (4) the due date for the present assignment.

Check the TEXT ALIGNMENT. As with the rest of your text, all of this information should be aligned with the left margin (try this: Ctrl + A, then Ctrl + L).

That said, the only portion of your text that will require separate alignment is the TITLE, which should be centered (Ctrl + E). (Note: Do not add quotation marks to your essay title or set it in italic font, unless there is a title within your title—e.g., My Reading of The Bridges of Madison County; or, My Interpretation of “Leda and the Swan.” Never add underlining or bold-face to the title, or any other part of your text—except the 10-pt. bold-face used in the Footer.)

Check the LINE SPACING. Again, there should be no additional line spaces inserted into the text, either before or after the title, or between paragraphs. (Note: Disregard the line and paragraph numbers included in the left margin of the sample text reproduced below.)

FIGURE 04
HEADERS + CONTINUOUS PAGE NUMBERS
FOOTERS + ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTION

WHAT:
It is necessary to format the HEADERS and FOOTERS of your document manually; thankfully, once they've been set, the software will reproduce this information and count the pages for you automatically. (Note: Using FOOTERS will be helpful when it comes time to organize and present all of the drafts that make up your complete workfolder for each essay assignment.)

HOW:
The header and footer of each page should be set at 0.5 inches. Use the page layout directions provided in the “MARGINS” section above to set these defaults. Again, a series of related steps must be followed to set the headers and footers and add continuous page numbers:

STEP 1: Select the “Insert” tab in the toolbar and click on the “Headers” icon to open the Header drop-down menu; select the first option: “Blank.” At this point the page-view will invert, allowing you to type your header in the header space. (Note: Disregard the line and paragraph numbers included in the left margin of the sample text reproduced below.)

FIGURE 05A (STEP 1)
STEP 2: In the inverted page-view, align the text to the right margin (Ctrl + R) and type your last name in 12-pt. TNR. Note: After your last name, click the spacebar once; do not hit the tab key or add any additional spaces between your last name and the position of the page number.

**FIGURE 05b (STEP 2)**

STEP 3: To add a continuous page number, select the “Design” tab in the toolbar and click the “Page Number” to open the Page Number drop-down menu. Scroll down the opened menu and select “Current Position” in order to insert the automatic page number. The numeral “1” will appear. The full header should be set in 12-pt. TNR. (Note: Disregard the line and paragraph numbers included in the left margin of the sample text reproduced below.)

**FIGURE 05c (STEP 3)**
STEP 4: To add the footer, click on the “Footer” icon, and follow the same procedures used to add the header. Align the footer with the left margin (Ctrl + L) and supply the assignment description and stage information here—e.g. Essay 2 (Second Draft) or Reading Response (Final Draft). Set this single-spaced line of text in bold 10-pt. TNR; do not add any additional paragraph lines or line spacing to either the footer or the header space. Note: To reformat the header or footer texts properly and establish MLA Style defaults, select the entire text (Ctrl + A) and give the mouse a right-click to open the formatting toolbar; use the font, font size, bold, and paragraph buttons here to reformat the header and footer accordingly. (Note: Disregard the line and paragraph numbers included in the left margin of the sample text reproduced below.)

FIGURE 05d (STEP 4)
06 WIDOW/ORPHAN CONTROL

WHAT: Default paragraph breaks often produce unnecessary gaps and blank spots at the bottoms of pages, or straggling lines that hangover at the top of pages. Override these problematic settings and guarantee the uniform presentation of your text by turning off the “Widow/Orphan Control” feature.

HOW: Select the full text [Ctrl +A] and follow these directions: (1) Select the “Page Layout” tab in the toolbar; click on the pop-up button in the bottom right-hand corner of the tab, at which point a “Paragraph” dialogue box will appear; click on the “Line and Page Breaks” tab; make sure all of the boxes, especially “Widow/Orphan Control,” are unchecked. Click on “Default” to retain this setting; click on “OK” to apply setting and return to document. (Note: Disregard the line and paragraph numbers included in the left margin of the sample text reproduced below.)

FIGURE 06
WHAT:
Before you hand in the final printed version of your text—or any draft for that matter—be sure that its format adheres to the various steps outlined above, and that your pages closely resemble the page layout represented below (minus the line and paragraph numbers, of course). Note: Whenever in doubt, ask questions.

FIGURE 07