

Text Essentials

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Typewriters and Spaces

Type a space after a full stop. Double spaces are for typewriters, with their extra-wide letters. With proportional computer fonts, double spaces look tacky. Every professional book, journal, and magazine on your shelf uses one space, and so should you.

The single and double quote marks on your keyboard are not what you need — they're called straight quotes, or typewriter quotes. Typographers' or "curly" quotes are what the real world uses; an apostrophe is a *single closing* curly quote. Your word processor probably converts straight quotes to real quotes on the fly (check the Autocorrect > Autoformat settings) but sometimes it messes up, so learn to type them by hand.

Don't underline anything (particularly not in these web-link days, and even though some old style books say you should). Use italics instead: ALL CAPS and underlining are both typewriter relics.

The key beside the zero on your keyboard is a hyphen, not a dash. To make a dash on a typewriter, you would type two hyphens (and Word will even convert them if you do), but see Insert Symbol to learn the shortcut for an en dash and an em dash. En dashes are used in a range (from x to y, replacing the 'to'), while longer em dashes show a break in a sentence—like this (or you can use an en dash with a space either side – like this.)

There are a multitude of special characters available in all fonts: curly quotes of course, a degrees symbol (°), an ellipsis (...), a bullet (•), some math symbols (×, ±, ÷), Spanish punctuation (¡, ¿), and accented characters (é, à, î, ñ, ö, š, and most importantly the macron: ¯). Don't try and fake these yourself; for example, by making a degrees sign out of a small superscripted 'o'.

Typewriters and Indentation

If you find yourself typing tab-tab-tab-tab, something's wrong. You're probably using the default tab stop, which are only half an inch apart. Set your own: click the tab stop button, click in the ruler. Choose large tabs except in special cases (e.g., when setting columns of numbers, use a decimal tab stop). The goal is a single tab between each item in a table—this will make editors much happier, as they won't have to delete hundreds of superfluous tabs. And *never* use the space bar to make things line up; this only works on typewriters.

Paragraphs are also controlled from the ruler. You don't need to indent the first line of your *very first* paragraph; we can see where it starts. All other paragraphs can have a small indent: a few letters, about a quarter inch. Don't use the tab key; drag the first-line indent marker in the ruler (like tabs, these ruler settings only affect the paragraph you're in, or

Paragraph Spacing

Line spacing is one of the best ways to improve readability, often better than making the text bigger. Check Format > Paragraph. The default is “single spaced”: try setting an *exact* line spacing about 120%

