Making your document look good: using MS Word the easy way

This note shows you how you can quickly and easily improve the appearance of a document with just a few key strokes. You can set up section and chapter headings with the font you want, change the appearance of your tables, create numbered and bulleted lists, all at the click of a button.

All this can be done very simply by using Microsoft Word’s styles.

What are styles?

A style is a set of formatting instructions. When you apply a style, Word will format the text according to how that style has been defined. For example, you might use larger, emboldened text in headings to make them stand out, or bullets and numbers to make lists.

Styles help you make sure that your document looks the same way throughout. They can save you time if you want to change your document’s appearance – changing a style changes all the text formatted with that style. You can also take advantage of powerful features such as numbering and tables of contents that use styles to build automatically.

Word contains dozens of built-in styles ready for you to use immediately. You can modify these styles to suit your own preferences, and you can also create your own customised ones.

Displaying styles

To see what styles are available, click on the Format menu, and choose Styles and Formatting, or click the Styles and Formatting icon on the toolbar. Word displays the Styles and Formatting task pane. You may find it useful to keep this pane open while you are working on a document.

You can change what is displayed in the task pane by selecting an option from the Show drop-down list:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Available formatting</th>
<th>Displays styles available for use in your document and any formatting you may have applied. For example, you may have selected some text and make it italics, or a different colour.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formatting in use</td>
<td>Displays the styles and formatting you have used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available styles</td>
<td>Displays styles only (no formatting).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All styles</td>
<td>Displays a list of all styles.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Types of style**

Word has four kinds of style:

**Paragraph**

The most important style of all. Use this to format a whole paragraph at a time. The task pane indicates paragraph styles with the symbol ☑.

The most dynamic paragraph styles are Heading 1 to Heading 9. These styles work automatically with outline numbering, tables of contents and cross references to make them a very powerful tool.

**Character**

Use these to format specific characters within a paragraph. Word indicates these styles with the symbol ☑.

Character styles are most commonly used with specific inbuilt Word features such as hyperlinks, page numbering and footnotes.

**Table**

Used for formatting within a table. Indicated by the symbol ☑.

You can apply pre-defined formatting such as fonts, borders, shading and spacing directly to the table text.

**List**

Used for numbering a list. Indicated by the symbol ☑.

This is similar to an outline numbered list but a lot less flexible, in that it can’t store paragraph formatting for each level. Only use this for very simple lists.

### Applying a style

You can apply styles from the **Styles and Formatting** task pane or directly from the **Style** drop-down list on the **Formatting** toolbar.

To apply a _paragraph_ style, place your cursor anywhere in the paragraph and select the style name. To apply a _character_ style, select the text then select the style name.

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If you have applied a paragraph style with some text inadvertently selected, Word may create a new style that is a combination of paragraph and character. If you see styles in the task pane with names like ‘Heading 1 Char’, this is likely to be what has happened.

To fix the problem, move to the combination style name and right-click or click on the down arrow. Choose **Select All x Instance(s)** then click on the correct style name. The combination style name should disappear.

### Modifying a style

Word has a number of built-in styles. These can be modified but cannot be deleted. The key style among these is Normal. This is the default paragraph style for all text in your document, and is the style on which most other styles are based. If you change Normal, for example, by selecting a different font, you will see many of the other styles change to match. This feature can be extremely useful … and also extremely annoying if you only wanted to change a single style.

There are two ways to modify a style: by entering settings in a dialog box, or by example.

**Modifying with a dialog box**

In the **Styles and Formatting** task pane, move your cursor to the style name and either click on the down arrow or right-click. Choose **Modify** from the drop-down menu. The **Modify Style** dialog box displays.
You can change basic formatting such as font attributes, and text justification and spacing directly from this box.

For a full list, click on the **Format** button. You can then access the settings for all the formatting options, such as tabs, borders, and numbering. Make your changes and click **OK**.

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Do not click **Automatically Update**.

If this is selected, Word will automatically update the style with your changes every time you apply manual formatting.

This causes altogether too much pain!

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**Modifying by example**

In this method, you make your changes directly to the text, and then tell Word to update the style based on the changes.

Select some text in a paragraph of the style you want to update and make your changes. Your formatting will appear in the **Styles and Formatting** pane as a combination of the style name and the changes. In the example below, the Heading 1 style has been changed to a font size of 14.

Move to the style to be updated, in this case it would be Heading 1, and right-click or click on the down arrow. Choose **Update to Match Selection**.

The entry for the formatting you applied to the selection disappears and the existing style is updated.

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**Creating a style**

As well as using and modifying Word’s inbuilt styles, you can create your own for a personalised look.

Place your cursor on a style that already has some of the formatting you want, and click the **New Style** button in the **Styles and Formatting** pane. Enter a name for the style. Select the **Style** type; the default is ‘Paragraph’.

A style can be based on another style. It will then inherit all the attributes of the parent style. If you make changes to the parent style, these will cascade through all the styles based on it. If you do not want changes to cascade, select ‘No style’.

Select the formatting options you want and click **OK**. Your new style appears in the **Styles and Formatting** pane ready for use.
Style tips

Why formatting disappears when you copy text
Word holds the formatting for a paragraph in the paragraph marker at the end of the paragraph. If you copy formatted text without copying the marker as well, the text will lose its formatting when you paste it.

If you can’t see the markers, click on the Show All button on the toolbar (labelled Show/Hide). This is very useful if you are copying text to another document and want it to retain a style you have created.

Why you should press Enter only once to end a paragraph
Do not use the Enter key to give yourself more space between paragraphs. This creates empty paragraphs that upset the flow of text from page to page. If you seem to have extra space at the top of a page, this is likely to be the reason. To see the paragraph marks, click on the Show All button.

To create space between paragraphs, format the style using Paragraph and the Indents and Spacing tab.

Why Word applies formatting behind your back
Many of Word’s more creative changes to your formatting are a result of functions within Tools – AutoCorrect Options. You will find the most troublesome features on the AutoFormat As You Type tab.

Most of the options in Replace as you type can be helpful, so you may want to leave these as they are.

However, the first three options in Apply as you type can cause a great deal of trouble. If you have ever tried to type a list of dates and had Word turn it into a numbered list, you will have encountered the problem.

The worst culprit of all is the very last option – Define styles based on your formatting. If you have manually formatted some text and have used the same (or nearly the same) attributes as an existing style, Word will assume that you want to apply that style to your text. This can have horrendous consequences when creating a table of contents. If you do nothing else, make sure this one is switched off!