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How to… Format the paragraphs in your document in Word 2010

Overview

There are three parts to the formatting process: **character** formatting, **paragraph** formatting and Page Layout. In this guide, we deal with Paragraph formatting. There are other guides which cover Character (text) formatting and Page Layout settings – and of course the settings you make in paragraph formatting and Page Layout will affect the look of your document too, so use this guide in conjunction with those.

Paragraph formatting

Paragraph formatting refers to those elements of formatting which can only apply to one or more entire paragraphs, not just selected text within a paragraph. This includes such things as bulleting and numbering and paragraph alignment.

The most common paragraph formatting options are available from the Paragraph group on the home tab of the Ribbon:

1. Bulleted list
2. Numbered list
3. Multi-level list
4. Decrease indent
5. Increase indent
6. Sort text
7. Display non-printing characters (spaces, tabs etc)

8. Align left
9. Align centre
10. Align right
11. Justify text
12. Line and paragraph spacing
13. Background colour
14. Borders
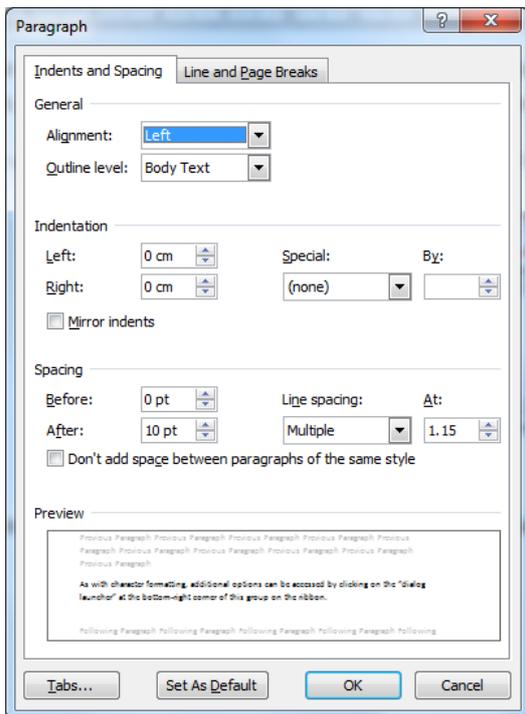
Clicking the dialog launcher at the bottom right opens the Format Paragraph dialog box (see the screenshots to the left).

The **Indents and Spacing tab** controls the general appearance of the paragraph.

In the General section, the **alignment property** changes whether the text aligns against the left margin, the right margin, or is centred or fully justified (spaced to produce a straight line against both margins). The settings here are more commonly controlled through the buttons on the ribbon (buttons 8 to 11 in the diagram above).

The Outline Level property affects how word uses the text that you're formatting. If you set the Outline Level to Level 1, Word uses the text as though it was a Heading 1 style, Level 2 equates to Heading 2 style and so on. This means that your text will appear in automatically generated tables of contents and in the Navigation pane (to see the navigation pane, tick it as an option on the View tab on the ribbon).

Setting the outline level to "Body text" (the default) means that it won't appear in the table of contents or in the Navigation pane.

In the Indentation section, the **Left** and **Right values** change whether the whole paragraph is indented from the one or other margin, while **Special** changes whether the first line is more or less indented than the remaining lines (if more, this is known as "first line indent" and if less, it's known as "hanging indent"). From here, you can also control the spacing between lines of a paragraph, whether there should be spacing before or after each paragraph.

The **Indentation** of a paragraph is usually better controlled by using the rulers (covered on the next page).

A note on Paragraph spacing

When you want to increase the **space between paragraphs** (as in this guide, for example), many people will hit Enter twice between paragraphs, but in fact it's much better to set a value here, in either the **Before** or **After** fields. Why? Because if you need to adjust the space between paragraphs, perhaps to get your document to fit on a single page, it's much easier to do by selecting your paragraphs and, say, decreasing the "After" value in here from 10pt to 6pt than by going through your document and removing the extra "Enter" keys that you've hit.
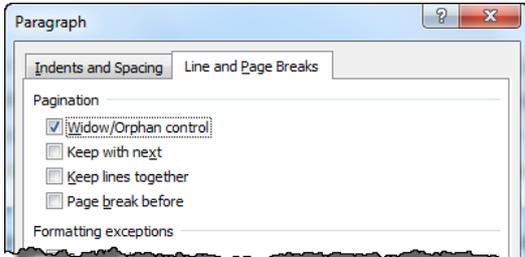

The Line and Page Breaks tab

The most useful items on the Line and Page break tabs are at the top: **Widow and Orphan control** ensures that you don't end up with a single line of text at the bottom of one page or the top of the next.

Keep with next allows you to ensure that one paragraph is kept with the start of the next, so that, for example, that a heading is kept with the first line of the next paragraph, rather than it ending up on the bottom of one page, and the paragraph at the top of the next.

Keep lines together does a very similar job, but works on selected text, so that you can keep all the lines of a paragraph together on one page (if, for example, you were quoting text from another document and wanted to ensure that that text always appeared as one block).

Page break before ensures that a paragraph will always be the first paragraph on a page.

Using the ruler to control paragraph indentation
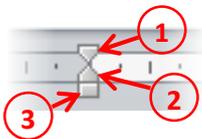
1. First line indent
2. Hanging indent
3. Moves 1 and 2 together

Dragging the **First Line Indent** icon adjusts the position of the first line of the paragraph only, as in the first two paragraphs, indented to align under the "h" in "Dear Mrs Smith" (see sample to the right).

Dragging the **Hanging indent** icon adjusts the remainder of the paragraph only, as in the numbered list in the sample, where the second and subsequent lines of these paragraphs are indented, but the first (numbered) line is not (although there is a space between the number and the start of the text).

> Dear Mr Smith
>
> Thank you for your recent letter. I appreciate you taking the time to contact us and will forward your letter to the department manager.
>
> You raise some interesting points, and I would like to address them one by one. Please do contact me if you feel that any of these matters need to be addressed further.
>
> 1st You ask what we are doing with respect to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests in our area. We have a dedicated member of staff responsible for this.
> 2nd You request to see records of the tribunals hed with regard to recent staffing issues. Unfortunately, we are unable to disclose this information due to confidentiality of our staff.