Microsoft Word Tips and Tricks

Writing an assignment often requires special characters and formatting elements. Here are some guidelines for achieving a more polished-looking document in Word on a PC.

Headers and Footers

A running header is text in the top margin of every page of your document. In newer versions of MS Word (since 2007), you can just double-click your mouse in the top margin to activate the text box for the header. (1) Use the Home tab Paragraph buttons to align the text to the right, (2) type your last name (for MLA-style papers), (3) a space, (4) select the Insert tab, (5) Page Number, and (6) Current Position and Plain Number to automatically number all the pages in your document.

A footer is text that appears in the bottom margin of every page. Generally, the pages of student papers are numbered in the header, but if a footer is called for, the same formatting steps may apply.

Footnotes

Footnotes are bibliographic citations or related notes placed beneath a short horizontal line at the bottom of a page, but not in the bottom margin. Under the References tab, the button “Insert Footnote” automatically creates the footnote formatting with a superscript number in the text and below a short separator line. You must type in the source information in the footnote itself. The footnote numbers will continue sequentially throughout the whole paper unless you select in the Footnotes section and choose “restart each page” under the Numbering dialogue box.

The keyboard shortcut for footnotes is CTRL+ALT+F. Hold down CTRL and ALT at the same time, then punch the F key just once. (Once a footnote is entered, you can mouse over the note in your text and the citation will appear in a floating text bubble, so you can double-check what each superscript number references without going to the bottom of each page.)

Subscript and Superscript

Subscript is a small character or characters that hang below the regular baseline of text. They can be inserted with the button on the Home tab. Superscript characters, such as exponential powers ($\pi r^2$), may be inserted with $^x$. To type a sub- or superscript character, click the button, type the character, then click the button again to resume typing regular characters.

Dashes

The dash — is a horizontal line that is longer than a hyphen and should not have a space before or after it. It is used for dramatic breaks in sentences. In the middle of a sentence, there must be a pair
around a phrase, e.g., an appositive, as with parentheses. The dash may be typed with two hyphens -- immediately after a word, followed by the next word, and then a space. No spaces should be around the hyphens. In MS Word, this sequence automatically creates an **em dash**, the dash that is as wide as the letter “m” in whatever font you are using.

**To insert a dash into text**, (1) place the cursor after the last letter of the word you want followed by a dash, (2) type two hyphens, (3) any character, (4) a space, then (5) just delete the unnecessary characters. Or, you may place the cursor where you want a dash, hold the ALT key while you type 0151, then release ALT. This is the code for the em dash on a PC. In Apple’s OSX, type Option + Shift + a hyphen.

**Accent Accent and Degree Symbol**

To type a ’ accent over a vowel, as in the words résumé and fiancé(e), hold down CTRL and punch the apostrophe ’ key, release both keys, then type the vowel (such as e) to get é. **To write the degree symbol °**, hold down both CTRL and SHIFT, punch the 2 key for the @ symbol, then release all those keys and press the space bar once.

**Hanging indents**

To create hanging indents, type your list of works cited (or references) first, then highlight the text and move the bottom two portions of the slider ½-inch to the right on the ruler, leaving the top part in place like this: 

![Hanging Indents](image)

**Dialogue Format and Punctuation**

When presenting dialogue, direct speech between characters in a story or between people in an essay, start a new paragraph for each turn taken in the conversation:

“I saw your father today,” she remarked. “He looked terrible. Is he feeling okay?”

I sighed. I had been expecting this question for weeks, but why did it have to come from Mrs. Winslow? “He’s been better, I suppose. You’d have to ask him how he feels.”

“All right, you don’t have to get all snippy with me!”

“I wasn’t . . .” I tried to mollify her, but it was too late. She had already gone off in a huff.

Punctuation for direct speech is done just like any other sentence, with a capital first letter at the beginning and a period, question mark, or exclamation point at the end of complete sentences, but placed inside the end quotation marks. For tags of speaking, e.g., *he said*, or *screamed Liza*, use a comma, whether the tag is placed before or after the quoted speech.