John Smith

English II/2nd Block/Ms. Nowacky

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Formatting a Paper is an Adventure in Word

Using appropriate MLA format does not have to be difficult. In fact, if students follow a few basic directions, they will find that setting up a page in Word is rather simple. Students should pay particular attention to line spacing, headings and titles, and pagination.

Line spacing can be tricky, especially since Word seems determined to add unnecessary spacing after paragraphs, but with a quick adjustment, students can avoid having “GRAND CANYON” written across their papers by Ms. Nowacky. There are two ways to eliminate the unwanted extra space. First, students can go to Page Layout (see the toolbar at the top of the screen). At spacing, they will find that Word has automatically set the “After” spacing to 10 pt. Students should simply change this to 0 pt (NOT Auto). The second way to eliminate that automatic extra space can be used when students are setting their line spacing. Stay under Home in the toolbar. Go to line spacing (in the Paragraph section) and click there. Check 2.0 for your line spacing, as your paper MUST be double-spaced. Under that same dropdown menu, click “Remove Space After Paragraph.” Problem Solved!

Creating a heading and a title is even easier. The heading should be left-justified and begin with the student’s name. The next line will give information about the class and block, while the last line should consist of the date the paper is to be submitted. As the paper is already double-spaced, no extra spaces will be needed in the heading—which should be double-spaced exactly as the rest of the paper is. The heading should appear only once in the essay—on the first page ONLY. The next line after the heading is for the title. Again, the paper is double-spaced and NO extra space is needed between the heading and the title, or between the title and the rest of the paper. Center the title over the body of the essay (use the center box in the toolbar). Try to make the title interesting—the reader should want to read the essay. An important concept to note: the title of the book studied is NOT the title of the paper. Students should create their own titles! After typing a title, hit enter only once, set the paper to left-justify again, and start writing.

Pagination can be a bit confusing for some. While the heading appears only once (on the first page), pagination should, of course, appear on every page, as this is how the reader knows what page s/he is on. To create automatic pagination, go to Insert on the toolbar menu. Move to the Header & Footer section. Click on Page Number, and a drop-down menu will appear. From here, choose Top of Page. This brings up more choices. In Microsoft Word, the choice students want is Plain Number 3. This is the choice that allows students to put the pagination in the top right corner. When the pagination header comes up, type the student’s last name and a space in front of the page number. Now click on the paper body itself (anywhere) to exit the header. The pagination will now be set, and will add pages as the writer continues.

A few other items are important to address as well. A student’s paper should be typed in 12 pt, Times New Roman. No one is going to be fooled by an extra large font, as one can generally assume that high school teachers attended high school themselves once, and they know many of the tricks. The titles of books or very long poems (think epics) should be italicized, as with *The Alchemist* or *The Iliad*. The titles of short stories or poems should be in quotation marks, as with “The Dream” or “Where I’m From.” Never use both at the same time!

Clearly, formatting a paper appropriately is not as difficult as it might seem. After following all the steps, students should find that they have a paper formatted to look like this one. Another sample will soon follow this one, and it will address in-text citation as well as Works Cited pages.