

MLA Typing Guide

GENERAL TYPOGRAPHY RULES

1. Choose the alignment that fits. Left-aligned text is easier to read. Justified text is harder to set without the inevitable word spacing problems. Right-aligned and centered text will not be used for body copy.
2. Body text is set anywhere from 9-12 points, depending on the font.
3. Choose one font and stick with it. Combining several typefaces will only confuse your reader. Use only black text, do not use colored text.
4. Use only one space after periods, colons, exclamation points, questions marks- any punctuation that separates two sentences.
5. Use italics, bold, and underline only as header fonts, not in body text.
6. Never use all capital letters. Text set in all caps is much harder to read.
7. Use the Tab key when beginning a new paragraph. NEVER use the space bar to align text. Indent the first line of paragraphs using the Tab key.
8. Avoid beginning three consecutive lines with the same word. Adjust the text to avoid/fix the problem.
9. Never leave widows or orphans on a page by themselves. [*Widow*: when a paragraph ends and leaves fewer than seven characters (not words) on the last line; *Orphan*: when the last line of a paragraph won't fit at the bottom of a column and must end itself at the top of the next column]
10. Double-space the entire document, including header and works cited.
11. Include a header at the top left on the first page of the document. The header should include: student name, course, date, and assignment.
12. Set margins of the document to 1 inch on all sides.

SPECIFIC RULES OF DIALOGUE

In dialogue, each person gets his own paragraph each time he speaks, no matter how briefly. Even a simply spoken, "No," gets a paragraph all to itself.

1. When it pertains to dialogue, sentence punctuation goes within the quotation marks.
2. When the speaker's tag (not part of the actual dialogue) comes **first**, the comma is outside the quotation mark. *Leah glanced up and said, "Are you still here?"*
3. When the speaker's tag comes **last**, the appropriate punctuation (comma, question mark, or exclamation point) comes before the closing quotation marks. *"I'm not leaving until you talk to me!" Scott responded angrily.*
4. When the speaker's tag is placed in the **middle** of dialogue, follow the previous rules; the comma goes inside the quotation mark before the tag line, and it's outside the quotation mark after the tag line. *"Fine. Have it your way," she said with a shrug, "but don't blame me if you don't like what you hear."*
5. When you have established which characters are talking, you may leave off the tags now and then. It makes the dialogue flow quickly. However, tags do help to keep the characters straight in the reader's mind. If the dialogue were to flow for pages without speaker tags, somewhere along the way the reader would forget which character was which. It's annoying to have to go back a page and sort the lines out.

MLA FORMATTING SOURCE

The Purdue OWL. Purdue U Writing Lab, 2010. Web. <<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>>.