



Word: Use Styles for Perfect Formatting

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Discover the Easy Way to Make Your Documents Look Neat and Consistent!

This article shows you how to:

- ✓ Use the built-in 'Styles' to smarten-up a document
- ✓ Tweak any style to look the way you want it
- ✓ Change the style of your document in just a few clicks

When you're writing a long document in Microsoft Word, it's the text that matters. Yes, you'd like it to look presentable, but you don't want to spend hours messing around with the font, size, colour, spacing and alignment of every paragraph and heading.

Luckily, there's no need: just make the most of Word's built-in Styles instead! With one click, you can be sure the heading you've just typed looks identical to every other heading in your document. Or tweak the way one heading looks, and the rest will be updated to match it. Read on to discover how to use this time-saving feature.



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How Styles Make Your Formatting Easier

Photography has gone digital

When you look at almost any piece of writing – in a book, magazine or newspaper, for example – you’ll usually find that it consists of several different styles of text. Along with ordinary text (known as ‘body text’), you’ll probably see headings or titles that are large and bold, subheadings that are a little smaller, quotations that are indented and italic, and so on.

Digital cameras have many benefits

A well-designed document should have a consistent appearance. For instance, every heading should look identical so that readers can tell immediately what’s a heading and what isn’t. You probably follow this kind of approach yourself when you create a document in Microsoft Word: with the wealth of formatting options available on the Home tab of the Ribbon, you can click a few buttons to make a heading larger, bold, bright-blue and centred. And, when you come to type the next heading, you can perform the same combination of clicks to format that one in the same way.



That’s assuming you can remember the combination of clicks you used, of course! If you can’t, the Format Painter tool can save you. Highlight the first heading you typed, then, on the **Home** tab of the Ribbon, click the **Format Painter** button in the ‘Clipboard’ group. Next, click the heading you’ve just typed, and the Format Painter will copy the formatting from your first heading to this one.

But where does that leave your old negatives?

That’s all rather a longwinded approach, especially if you’re using several different styles of text in a document. A better way is to use the Styles feature in Microsoft Word. This gives you a collection of built-in, ready-to-use text styles, all just a single click away whenever you need them. If something you typed should be a main heading, click **Heading 1**; if something else should be a subheading, choose **Heading 2**, and so on.





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Rather than requiring a long sequence of clicks, it takes just one, and it ensures that all your headings really do look identical. Even better, if you later decide that your main headings would actually look better if they were slightly bigger, you just make a quick modification to that 'Heading 1' style and Word will update all the headings in your document automatically.

Consistent
formatting with
one click!

In a nutshell, then, you might spend a few minutes setting up your Styles, but you'll save a lot more time by using them when you're concentrating on writing. And the longer or more complex your document, the more time you'll save.

Getting Started: Using Word's Built-in Styles

Let's start with a gentle introduction. Word comes with a set of built-in styles, and they may well be all you need, so we'll begin by taking a look at those. First, follow the steps below to make the styles easy to use while you work:

Get started
with Styles

1. Start Microsoft Word and, if necessary, click on **Blank document** on the Start screen so that Word gives you a blank white page. Alternatively, if Word is already running and you're working on a document, save it (by pressing **Ctrl** + **S**), close it (with **Ctrl** + **W**) and create a blank document (with **Ctrl** + **N**) so you can experiment with the Styles feature without the risk of mucking up your work!
2. Now look at the 'Styles' group on the **Home** tab of the Ribbon. Here you'll see a rectangular box listing several of the built-in styles, as pictured in the next screenshot. Depending on the width of your Word window, this box may be wide or narrow, but it's always rather fiddly to use. We want to make the styles more accessible, so click the embossed arrow in the bottom-right corner of the group.



Click the
embossed arrow
in the 'Styles'
group



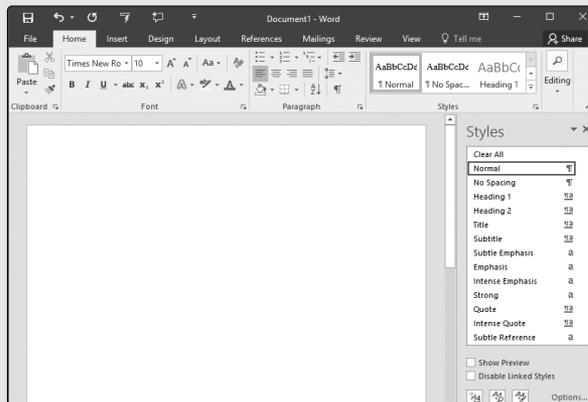


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Dock the Styles panel to the side of the window

3. A panel headed **Styles** appears. At the moment, this panel is quite likely sitting over the top of your document, and that's a silly place for anything to be! Move the mouse to its title bar – on or beside the word 'Styles' – and double-click. This moves that panel off to the right-hand side of the window and docks it there, out of the way but always accessible:



See previews of the styles

4. At the moment, you can see that this panel contains a list of styles with names like 'Normal', 'Heading 1' and 'Subtitle', but you have no idea what they look like! To put that right, tick the box beside **Show Preview** at the bottom of the panel.





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This panel will now stay fixed to the right of your window until you close Word (although you can hide the panel by clicking the x in the panel's top-right corner).



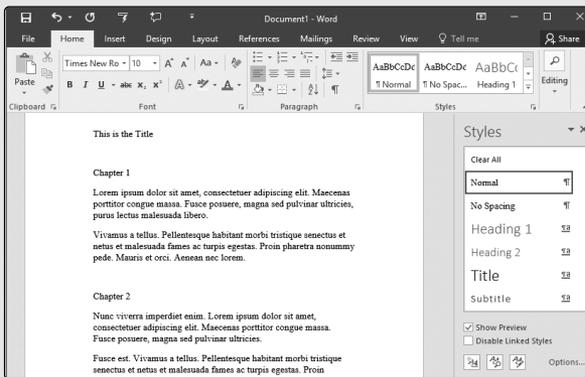
Next time you start Word and/or click the embossed arrow in the corner of the 'Styles' group, this panel will automatically fix itself to the right of the window, as it is now, and the **Show Preview** box will already be ticked, so you won't have to bother with the two steps above.

Now let's run through a quick tutorial to see how these styles work:

1. At the top of your document, type the words 'This is the Title', then press **Enter** a couple of times.
2. Now type 'Chapter 1', then press **Enter** to move to the next line and type two or three paragraphs of text – anything at all, it doesn't have to make sense!
3. Below those paragraphs, press **Enter** again and type 'Chapter 2', and then add another paragraph or two of random text. The result will then look something like this:



Create an example document like this





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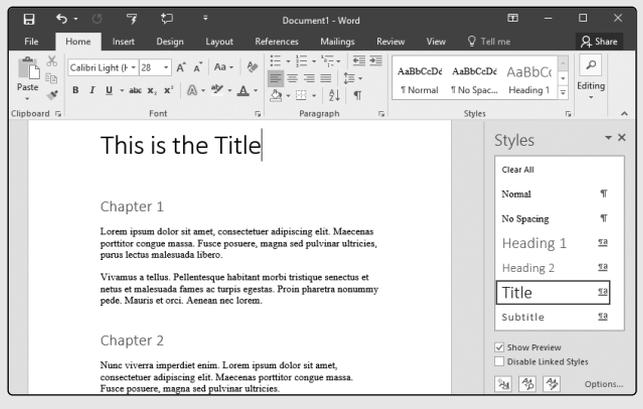
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Apply these styles to your text

Extra spacing in the body text?

4. Now let's smarten this up using those styles:
 - First, click somewhere in the first line ('This is the Title') and then, in the Styles panel, click the style named **Title**.
 - Click somewhere in the 'Chapter 1' line and then click the style named **Heading 1**. Next, click somewhere in your 'Chapter 2' line and apply the **Heading 1** style to that as well.
 - The paragraphs of text you typed are using the style named **Normal** at the moment, which puts a little gap between each line and a larger gap between each paragraph. Click somewhere in your first paragraph and then click the style named **No Spacing**: as its name suggests, it removes that extra space between lines and paragraphs. If you like this, click somewhere in each of your other paragraphs in turn and apply the **No Spacing** style to those as well. (Having done that, you might like to insert blank lines between consecutive paragraphs by clicking at the end of each and pressing **(Enter)**.)

Now your document should look something like this:





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The alternative: apply Styles as you go

The short tutorial above has given you a quick introduction to Styles (and it's just the beginning!), but we didn't do things in the most efficient way. We effectively wrote the whole document and then applied our styles to it at the end. While some users like to write first and format later, many of us prefer to format as we go, so that we can see our document taking shape, and there's a slightly-quicker way to do this using Styles. (You might like to press **Enter** a couple of times at the end of your document and try it this way yourself.)

We wrote first
and then applied
the styles

Start by clicking the Title style at the beginning of the line you're about to type, and then type your title. Press **Enter** a couple of times. Click the **Heading 1** style and type your 'Chapter 1' heading. Then press **Enter** again. Now you're ready to type your ordinary paragraphs: if you were happy with the spaced-out style named 'Normal' for ordinary body text, just start typing – Word always switches to that style automatically after a heading. If you prefer not to have that extra space, click the **No Spacing** style and then start typing.

You can choose
a style before
you type

Quick tips for working with Styles

Hang on to the document you've created so far – we'll use it to take things a little further in a moment. Beforehand, though, here are two quick tips to accompany what we've covered so far:

Paragraph and Character Styles: there are actually three different types of Style, and little symbols to the right of the style names in the Styles panel show you which type is which:



A Paragraph style. When you choose one of these, the whole paragraph you're working on (the paragraph containing the text cursor) then takes on this style.

Applies to
the current
paragraph





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Applies only to selected text



A Character style. Unless you select some text first, this style is applied only to the single word in which the text cursor is flashing. If you want to apply it to several words (or any larger passage of text), you must select that text and then click the style.

Selected text or the whole paragraph



A Paragraph and Character style. If you don't select any text before clicking one of these styles, the style will be applied to the whole of the current paragraph. If you do select some text, it will be applied to that text only.

The current style has a box around it

Click any text to see which style it uses: the Styles panel isn't only for applying styles to your text, it shows you which style is being used. Click one of your 'Chapter' headings, for instance, and you'll see a box around the Heading 1 style in the Styles panel, indicating that this is the style used for that particular paragraph.

Try a Change of Style with a Different 'Style Set'

The quick tutorial you followed a moment ago should have demonstrated that the Styles feature gives you an ultra-quick way to format the various elements in your document, as well as ensuring that all the formatting is consistent throughout your document.

Do you like the styles you're using?

The question is, are you happy with the way it looks? Do you like the fonts, the text sizes, the colours, and the layout? At the moment, for example, your headings are blue, your title at the top of the page is black, and everything is aligned to the left.

If not, try a different Style Set

If you're not keen on this, that's no problem. Microsoft Word offers a generous collection of 'Style Sets', and all we've used so far is the one it initially presented us with. Follow the appropriate step below for your version of Word to experiment





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with the other Style Sets available and see if one of those would be more to your taste.

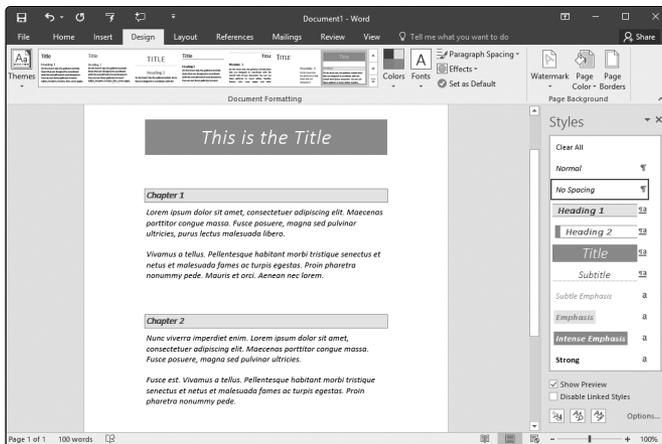
If you haven't done so already, it would be worthwhile to maximise your Microsoft Word window to fill your screen by clicking the middle button of the group of three in its extreme top-right corner. This makes it easier to 'audition' the various Style Sets and see their effect on your document.



Word 2019, 2016 and 2013:

Switch to the **Design** tab on the Ribbon. In the 'Document Formatting' group you'll see a wide box containing a row of items. Each of these items is a different 'Style Set'. Move your mouse over each in turn: as you hover over one of these Style Sets, Word will temporarily apply it to your document to show you how it looks. When you find a Style Set you like, click it. Word reformats your document to use this set of styles, and you'll see them listed in the Styles panel to the right as well.

Hover over a Style Set to see its effect





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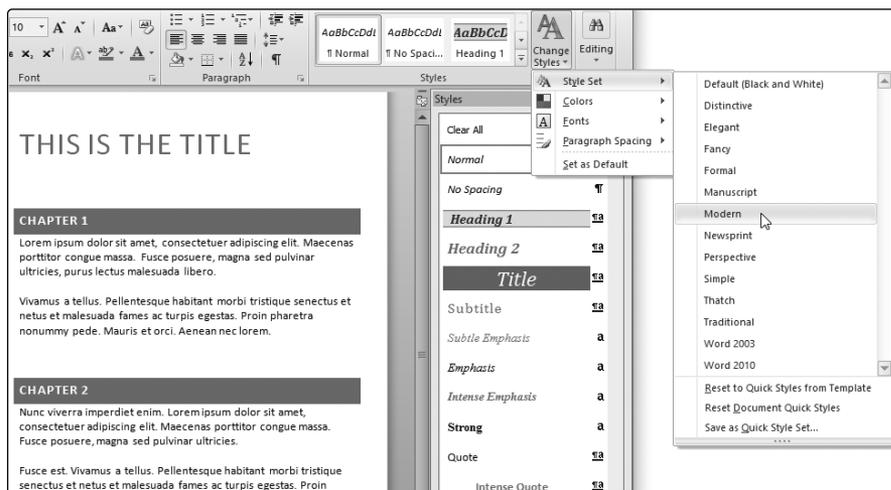
You can adjust its colours and fonts separately

Perhaps you've found a Style Set whose general layout you like, but you're not too keen on the colour scheme it uses, or the choice of fonts? In that case, you can use the **Colors** and **Fonts** buttons just to the right of the wide box. These offer a range of different colour schemes (or font schemes), and you can 'audition' those by hovering over them with the mouse in the same way to see which works best, and then click the one you've settled on to apply it.

Word 2010 and 2007:

Audition Style Sets to see which you like best

Switch to the **Home** tab on the Ribbon (if you're not already there). In the 'Styles' group, click the **Change Styles** button and then move the mouse down to **Style Sets**. On the pop-out menu that appears, you'll see a list of names such as 'Distinctive', 'Formal' and 'Modern'. Move your mouse over each in turn: as you hover over one of these Style Sets, Word will temporarily apply it to your document to show you how it looks. When you find a Style Set you like, click it. Word reformats your document to use this set of styles, and you'll see them listed in the Styles panel to the right as well.





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If you find a Style Set that's almost right, but not quite, click the Change Styles button again and move down to Colors to audition different colour schemes for the Style Set you've chosen, or Fonts to try out different combinations of fonts. In either case, when you hit upon a colour scheme or font scheme you like, click it to apply it.

Choose different colour schemes or fonts

Summary: using Styles and Style Sets

Before we move on, let's take a quick dash through what we've covered so far and explain how you use all this in your day-to-day work in Microsoft Word. Let's assume you've just sat down and started Word to begin work on a new document.

Create a style-based document

First, open the Styles panel at the right of the Word window, as you did on page 3.

Open the panel

Next, if you find this helps your 'creative process', you might like to choose a favourite Style Set by following the steps above.

Now begin writing your document, making use of the named styles in the Styles panel. As I mentioned earlier, when you're at the beginning of a new paragraph, you can click a style and then start typing; alternatively you can type first and then, while the cursor is still flashing somewhere within (or at the end of) that paragraph, click the style you want to apply to it. This isn't as arduous as it might sound because, unless you choose otherwise, Word will apply the 'Normal' body text style to every paragraph, and that's the one you'll use by far the most.

Select styles as you write (or afterwards)

Although you're using these Styles, you can still use bold, italic and underlining wherever you like. Similarly, you can still align paragraphs to the centre or right, indent text, create bulleted or numbered lists, and so on.





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Switch between Style Sets whenever you like

At some point during your writing, you might decide that the Style Set you've been using up to now isn't quite right for this document. (Or, indeed, you might open the document in days or weeks to come and decide it isn't styled as it should be.) If so, just pick a different Style Set or adjust the colours or fonts of the Style Set you're using, as we did above, until you're happy with it.

The wonderful thing about using Styles for all your formatting is that you're never committed to anything: you can restyle your whole document at the drop of a hat!

Tweak a Style to Look Exactly as You Want It

So far, we've covered all the basics of the Styles feature and – for many Word users – that's enough. Those Style Sets, along with the extra variations of colour and font, give you plenty of flexibility in your document design.

Is one of the styles not quite as you want it?

But perhaps you're a little fussier than that? Perhaps, for example, you've found the perfect Style Set, but you just wish its 'Heading 1' style were bold and had a bottom border, or its 'Title' style were centred rather than left-aligned?

Of course, you could take care of that yourself, working through all your uses of 'Heading 1' or 'Title' to adjust them to taste, and perhaps making use of the Format Painter (mentioned on page 2) to speed things up a little. But we can do better than that!

You can change it as you like

Whichever Style Set you've chosen, the Styles it contains are not carved in stone. If you think they should look a little different, you can change them. Better still, those changes will be applied throughout your document automatically – another of the great benefits of using Styles.





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Let's put this to the test using the example document you created earlier. In that document, you typed 'Chapter 1' and 'Chapter 2', and added a few paragraphs of text between them, and those chapter titles were given the 'Heading 1' style. They look rather plain, like the example to the right, and you'd like them all to be in bold text with a bottom border.

Chapter 1

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas porttitor congue massa. Fusce posuere, magna sed pulvinar ultricies, purus lectus malesuada libero.

Vivamus a tellus. Pellentesque habitant morbi tristique senectus et netus et malesuada fames ac turpis egestas. Proin pharetra nonummy pede. Mauris et orci. Aenean nec lorem.

Chapter 2

Nunc viverra imperdiet enim. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas porttitor congue massa. Fusce posuere, magna sed pulvinar ultricies.

Example: make changes to the 'Heading 1' style

Perhaps you've experimented with the Style Sets and your example document now has much fancier-looking chapter headings, possibly already bold and/or with a bottom border? If so, go back to the **Design** tab (in Word 2019/2016/2013) or click the **Change Styles** button (in Word 2010/2007) and switch back to a plainer Style Set so that you get the full effect of the steps below!



1. First, highlight the first heading ('Chapter 1') you typed into your document by swiping over it with the mouse.
2. Make it bold by clicking the 'B' button in the 'Font' group on the **Home** tab of the Ribbon, or by pressing **(Ctrl) + (B)**.
3. Still on the **Home** tab of the Ribbon, in the 'Paragraph' group, click the little arrow beside the 'Borders' button and choose **Bottom Border**. The heading you selected now looks something like the following screenshot, and crucially (let's assume!) it now looks the way you feel your headings should look.



Make your heading bold and add a border



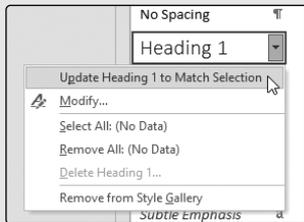


Update this style
to match

Chapter 1

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas porttitor congue massa. Fusce posuere, magna sed pulvinar ultricies, purus lectus malesuada libero.

- Now turn your attention to the Styles panel. You can see there's a box around **Heading 1** to indicate that this is the style used by the text we've selected. Move your mouse on to **Heading 1** and an arrow button will appear to its right. Click that arrow button and, on the menu that appears, choose **Update Heading 1 to Match Selection**.



Your other
headings update
automatically!

- Done! Have a look at where you've typed 'Chapter 2' in your document, and you'll see that it's also bold with a bottom border. The same will be true for anywhere else in your document you've used that 'Heading 1' style, and anywhere else you use it as you continue writing the document: as far as Microsoft Word is concerned, this is now the way 'Heading 1' should look wherever it's used in this document.

Of course, the same steps apply to any other style you want to alter. Just find and select some text of that style in your document, format it as required, then click the arrow beside its style name and choose the same **Update [style] to Match Selection** item.





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Quick Tips to Make the Most of Styles

I explained the main benefits of using the Styles feature at the beginning of this article, and those should probably be apparent now, especially if you've followed the examples yourself and explored the Style Sets on offer.

But the benefits don't end there. Several other features of Microsoft Word become available when you make use of Styles (and particularly headings) which you might find useful too.

Move around your document quickly in the Navigation Pane

If you're working on a long document, you probably naturally divide it into separate sections, each with its own heading or subheading. And, of course, this is why Word offers built-in styles named **Heading 1**, **Heading 2** and so on. Provided you make use of those heading styles, Word gives you a way to jump around your document quickly and easily.

Switch to the **View** tab on the Ribbon. In Word 2019, 2016, 2013 or 2010, tick the box beside **Navigation Pane** in the 'Show' group; in Word 2007, tick the box beside **Document Map** in the 'Show/Hide' group.

Now you'll see a panel at the left of the window which lists all the headings in your document in a tree-like layout. (And as you add more headings, they'll appear here too.) Rather than having to scroll through your long document to find the section you want to read or edit, just click the appropriate heading in this list to jump straight to it.

Collapse headings for quick scrolling

If you use Word 2019, 2016 or 2013, you might have noticed something unusual about any headings you've used: when you move the mouse over them, a little:

Styles let you do even more

Make use of the heading styles...

...and quickly jump from place to place in your document

Click a heading's arrowhead to collapse it





arrowhead appears to their left. You can click this arrowhead to hide the text below that heading: if you do this for all the headings whose text you don't need to see, your document becomes much shorter and you can scroll through it far more quickly. To reveal the text, just click the arrowhead again.

▶	Chapter 1
◀	Chapter 2
	Nunc viverra imperdiet enim. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas porttitor congue massa. Fusce posuere, magna sed pulvinar ultricies.

Quickly generate a table of contents

Generate a table of contents

A final nifty benefit is that Word can generate a table of contents from your headings, and it is even replete with page numbers.

Update it with two clicks

Go to the very top of your document, press **(Ctrl) + (Enter)** to insert a blank page at the beginning, then go to the top of that page. Now switch to the **References** tab on the Ribbon, click the **Table of Contents** button at the far-left and pick one of the 'Automatic' tables. Lo and behold, a table of contents is added to this page, listing all the headings you've entered so far.

Word doesn't update this table automatically, but you can update it whenever you like as your document grows and changes. Just go back to the top of your document, click the table of contents, and then click the **Update Table** button that appears above it. In the little dialog that opens, choose **Update entire table** and click **OK**.

