



Word processing

Writing an assignment on a computer is pretty easy, right? Open a new document in Microsoft Word or Pages (or the word processor of your choice), type away, don't forget to save, and print it out when done. It's maybe the easiest part of this whole assignment process.

There's a lot that you can do in a word processing program, though, and you'd be surprised at the tips and tricks that can make your assessment life a lot easier.

How do I get a word processing program?

- All Western computers for student use will have Microsoft Word available;
- As a Western Sydney University student you can download Microsoft Office for your PC, Mac, or other compatible device for free: see [The Student Advantage](#);
- [Google Docs](#) is a web-based alternative that's particularly useful for collaboration. You can even submit your document to Turnitin by choosing the Google Drive option when the time comes;
- There are many other word processors that are free or commercially available. See [this list on Wikipedia](#).

Note: the images and instructions in this guide are based on using Word 2010.

The basics

Check your Subject Outlines for submission requirements. Chances are they all ask for pretty much the same thing, e.g.

- 12 point neutral font like Arial or Times New Roman
 - double spaced
 - large margins
 - page numbers
- possibly your name and ID number in the header or footer.

These requirements are there to make the assessment easy to read and therefore easy to mark. You might or might not lose marks if you don't follow these directions, but following the directions shows that you have paid attention and you care about your work.

Before you start typing up a document, always check whether you are required to use a specific template and if so, use that instead.

Some features of Microsoft Word and how to use them

Fonts

Now is not the time to get fancy. Make your assignment stand out from the rest for its content, not the way it looks. Choose a standard font that is easy to read. Serif fonts are slightly easier on the eye – the ‘serif’ is the little line that flicks out in a letter, like in Times New Roman. Sans serif fonts, like Arial, have cleaner lines. Fixing the size at 12 point makes for easy reading.

The following image compares the sans serif font Arial with the serif font Times New Roman:

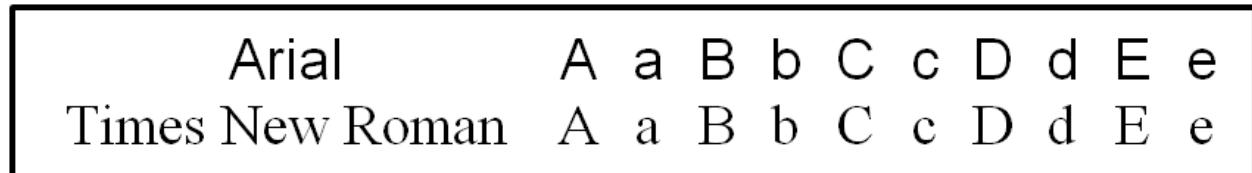


Figure 1: Comparison of Arial and Times New Roman fonts.

Double spacing

In MS Word go to Page Layout > Paragraph to change line spacing to 1.5 lines or double spacing. This makes the text easier to read.

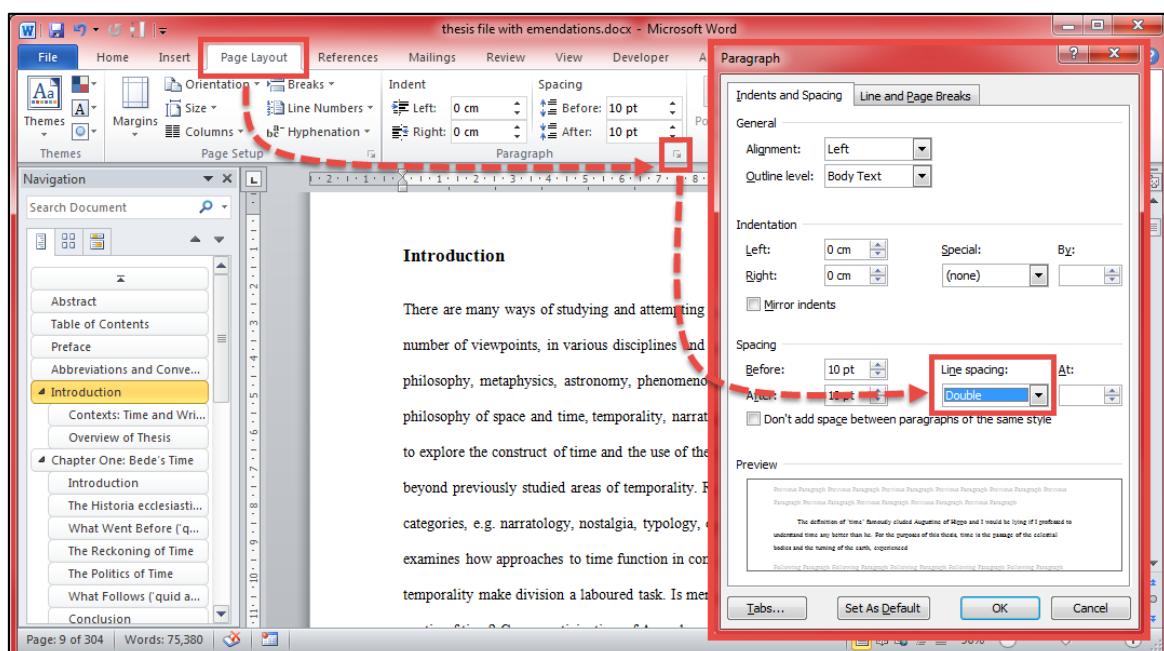


Figure 2: Adjusting line spacing in Microsoft Word.

Margins

These are also modified in the Page Layout settings in Word. Left-hand margins of 3-4 cm are preferable, especially when the assignment is to be marked in hard copy, but this is not always necessary for electronic marking. Some units ask that you do not modify margins, so always double check the requirements of each unit.

Page numbers

Word can insert page numbers automatically for you (Insert > Page Number) and there are several options for placement in the header or footer.

Headers and footers

The header is the top section of the page, and the footer is the bottom. Both of these are outside of the main area for text on the page. The main use for headers and footers is to place information that needs to be on each page but does not change, such as your name and student ID. To modify these, click in the header or footer area and start typing. Alternatively, go to the Insert tab in Word and choose Header or Footer.

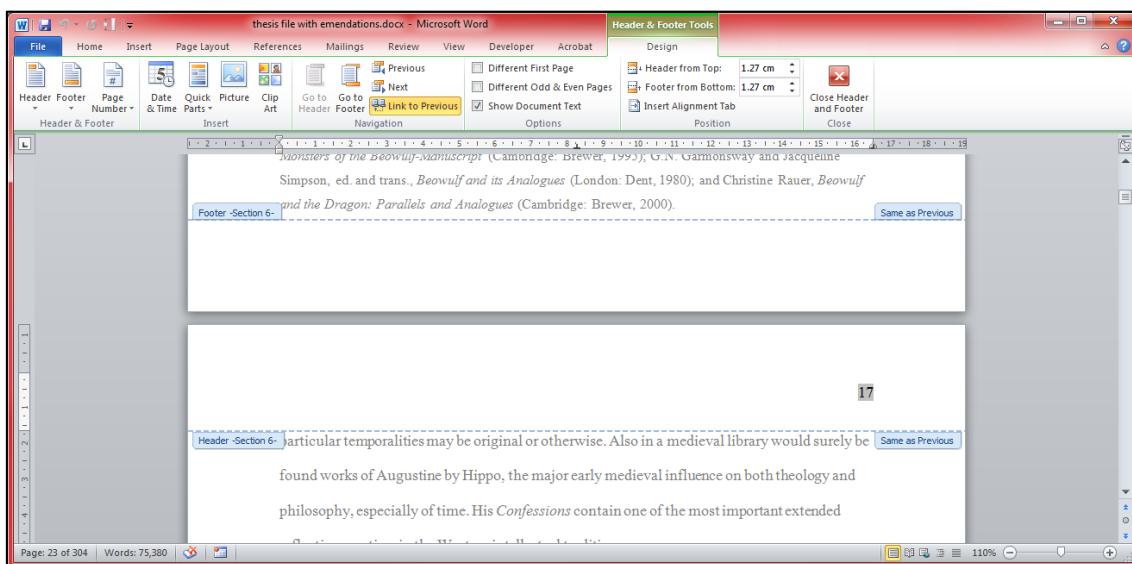


Figure 3: Inserting a header or footer.

Sections

You can insert section breaks into a document by going to Page Layout > Breaks. Section breaks can be used to keep parts of a document separate, to preserve formatting or restart things like page numbering or footnotes.

Word Count

When you have assignments with a word limit, most word processors can check this for you. In Microsoft Word the word count is often displayed at the bottom left of the screen and you can click the number for more information. Alternatively you can go to Review and click the Word Count button. You can tell Word to count or not count footnotes and endnotes. If you want to know the word count of just part of the document, for example of the essay by itself without the reference list, just select the relevant section using your mouse and perform a word count.



Figure 4: Accessing the word count from the Review tab menu.

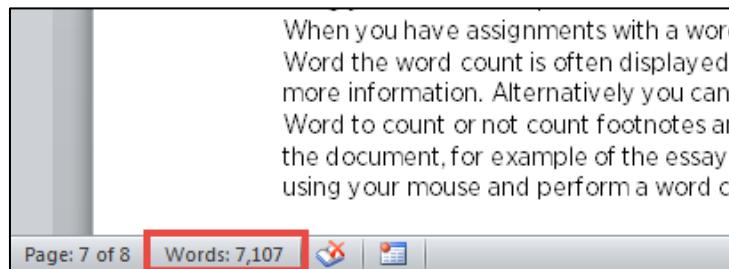


Figure 5: The word count at the bottom left of a Word document.

Hanging indents

Reference lists and bibliographies look much cleaner when you use a hanging indent. This means that each new entry starts with no indent on the left, but if the reference goes over more than one line, subsequent lines are indented. This makes it easy to tell at a glance where each reference ends and another begins. It also makes it easy to glance down the left hand side and see which authors are being referred to. Add a hanging indent by going to the Paragraph menu.

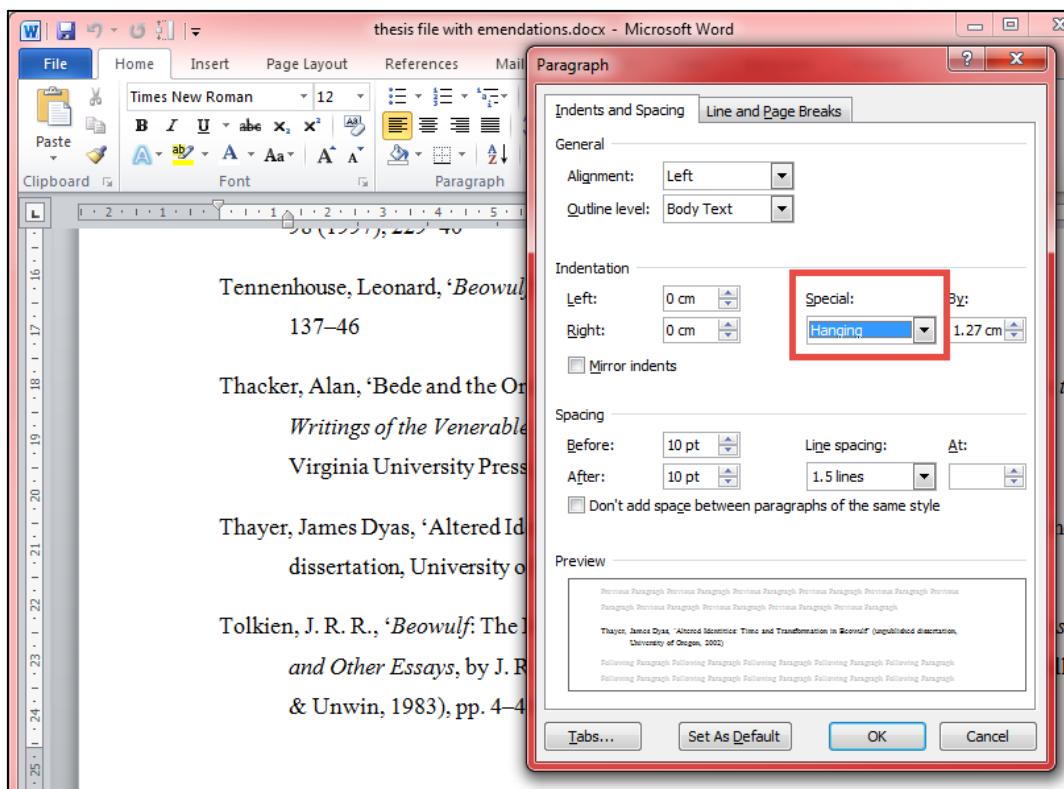


Figure 6: How to add a hanging indent.

Alphabetising

If you need an alphabetical list, for example for your reference list if it's alphabetical by author surname, Word can do that for you. Select the appropriate text and then click the little AZ button.

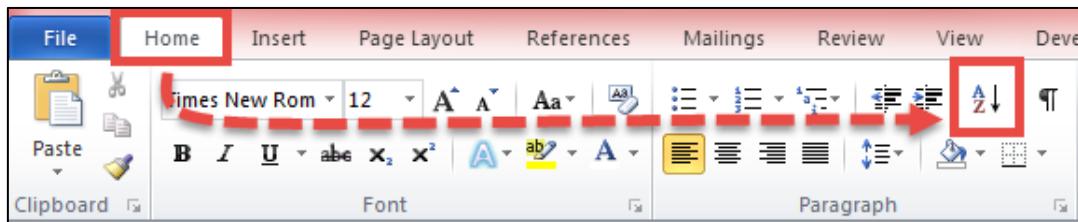


Figure 7: The alphabetise button.

Styles and complex documents

Microsoft Word has several useful features that can help you navigate and control documents that are more complex. If you have a lengthy document, or need to use a lot of headings in your assignment, it's a good idea to use the Styles feature.

Styles allows you to 'tag' sentences and paragraphs according to their function, e.g. Title, Heading 1, Heading 2, Quote, Normal, etc. For example, 'Normal' might be the default setting for your text. If you tag all paragraphs as 'Normal' style, but forgot to double space, you can then right-click the style, choose 'Modify', and change the spacing from single to double. Now all the text tagged 'Normal' in the document will change without you having to do it manually.

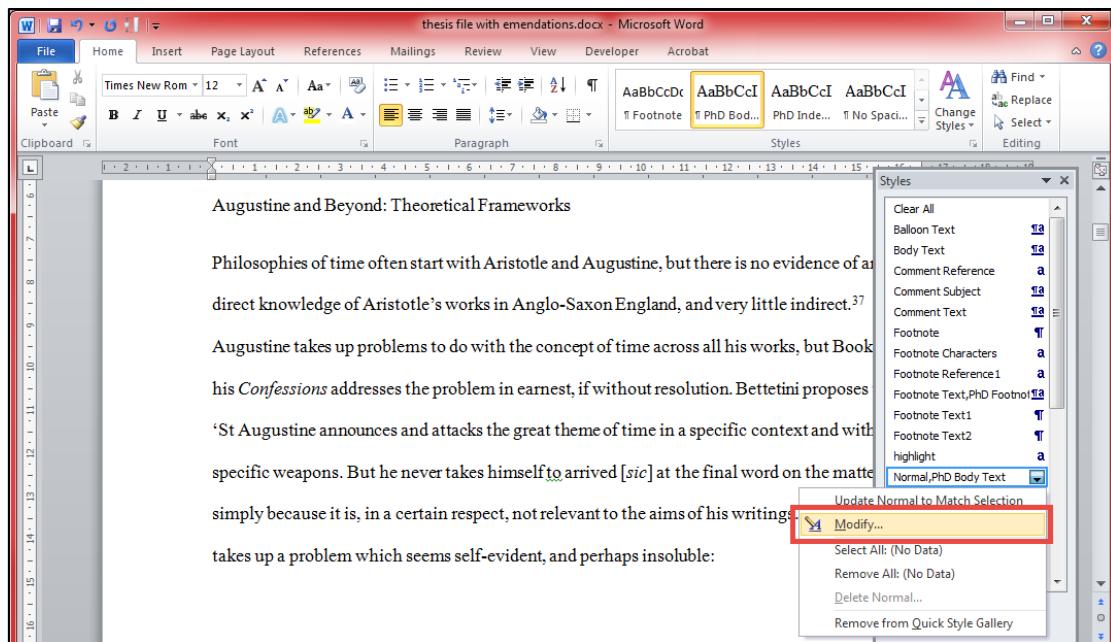


Figure 8: Using the styles menu.

The headings styles use a hierarchical system, so that Heading 1 is the first level, and Heading 2 is the style for subheadings under Heading 1, and Heading 3 is a subheading of Heading 2, and so on.

There are several uses for headings:

One, as described above for 'Normal', you can change the appearance at any time without having to go through and do it individually to each heading.

The second use is navigation: you can go to View and tick Navigation Pane, and on the left side of the document you will see all your headings and be able to click each to go to that section, without having to scroll. Easy!

A third use of headings styles is that you can ask Word to automatically generate a Table of Contents based on the headings in use in the document. Go to the References tab, and then to Table of Contents.

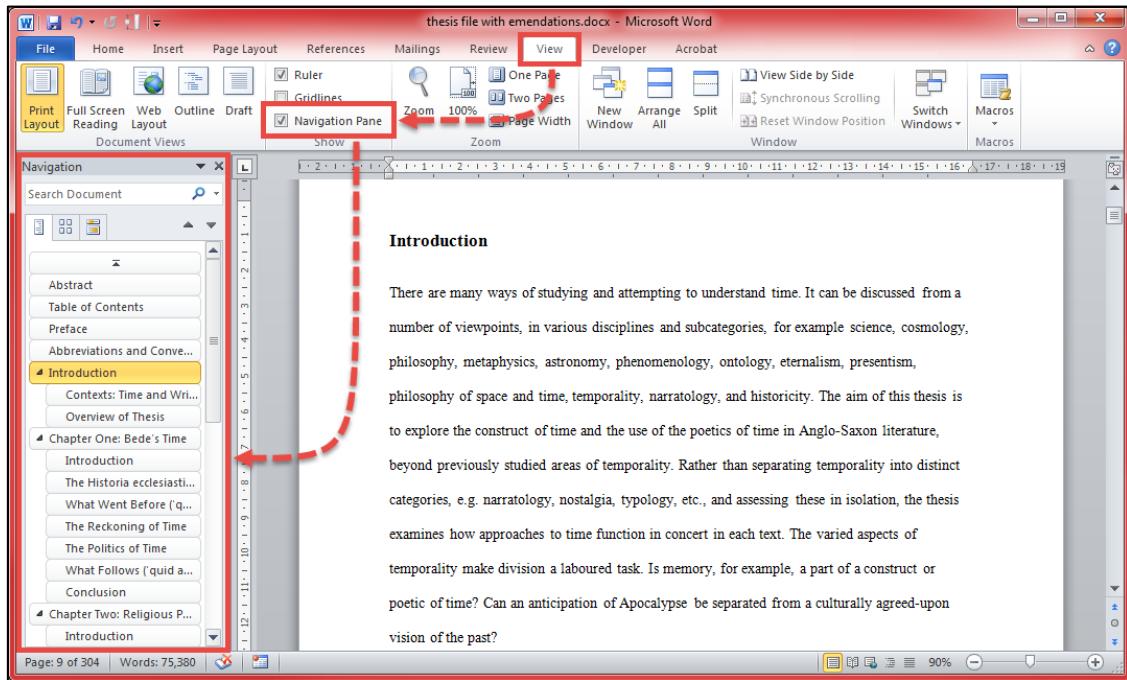


Figure 9: Adding the navigation pane.

More information

- Search [Linkedin Learning](#) for videos and courses on Microsoft Word, Office, or any other program you use ([Western login required](#))
- [Shauna Kelly: Basic Concepts of Microsoft Word](#)
- [Digital Unite: How to Use Microsoft Word](#)