

Format

Your professionalism will be judged at a glance. In other words, your essay needs to be cleanly formatted in such a way that the reader can easily and comfortably move through it.

Your formatting mission is to let nothing distract your reader from the story you've written.

That means following some simple and easy guidelines as you write. We will divide these guidelines into two sections: printed essays, and online submissions.

Printed Essays

When you type and print an essay for submission, you want the essay to look like the most professional piece of writing ever.

First and foremost, **follow any requirements provided by the sponsor.** While this lesson has some suggested guidelines, you should always do what a prompt requires. For example, I don't suggest double-spacing, however some prompts may require it. **Always follow prompt requirements!**

Here's how to format your printed essays so they look clean, professional, and easy-to-read:

- Use **size 11 or 12 type** in a universally respected font. Use 12 point in essays 300 words or fewer.
- For essays 300 words or more, use **15 point** (or 1.25x in Google Docs) **line spacing** (*not* single, double, or 1 ½ spacing). See graphics on the next page to see how to do this in various word processors.
- Use **12 point paragraph spacing** so there is a nice gap between paragraphs.
- Do not include a salutation and signature – this is not a letter, even if they call it a “Letter of Intent.”
- For your heading, follow the prompt requirements. If no requirements are given, create a heading in a universally-respected formatting style, such as MLA. Align the heading on the left side of the paper. The sample essay includes a MLA heading (page 3).
- Indent each new paragraph ½ inch.
- If your essay is allowed more than 500 words, you may need multiple pages. In that case, create a header in the header area of the document. Align it to the right, type your last name, and then command the word processor to automatically insert the page number.
- Set margins at 1" on all 4 sides (top, bottom, left, right – ignore “gutter”).

Online Submission

Online submission forms are extremely tricky. Sometimes the formatting you do in a word processor, including bold, italics, and underlining, can be wiped out by the HTML transfer. Copying-and-pasting your essays from a word processor (even an online one, like Google Docs) can get messy. Here are some guidelines to make your life easier.

- Use size 11 or 12 in a professional, universally respected font. Use 12 point in essays 300 words or fewer. Sometimes you will not be allowed to choose size or font, making this decision a lot easier.
- You will probably not be able to change the line spacing. If you are, I recommend against messing with it, as this could accidentally screw up how your essay looks when the sponsors read it.
- To create a gap between paragraphs, simply hit “Enter” or “Return” twice after a paragraph.
- Do not include a salutation and signature – this is not a letter, even if they call it a “Letter of Intent”
- For online submission boxes, *do not* include a heading unless prompted to do otherwise.
- Do not indent paragraphs in online submission boxes. It is expected that all paragraphs begin on the left (just look at any article on a website, and you'll notice there's no indenting).
- No headers for multiple pages, since there aren't multiple pages with online submissions.
- Avoid using bold, italics, and underlining for online submissions if possible; otherwise, research HTML tags for these specific types of formatting

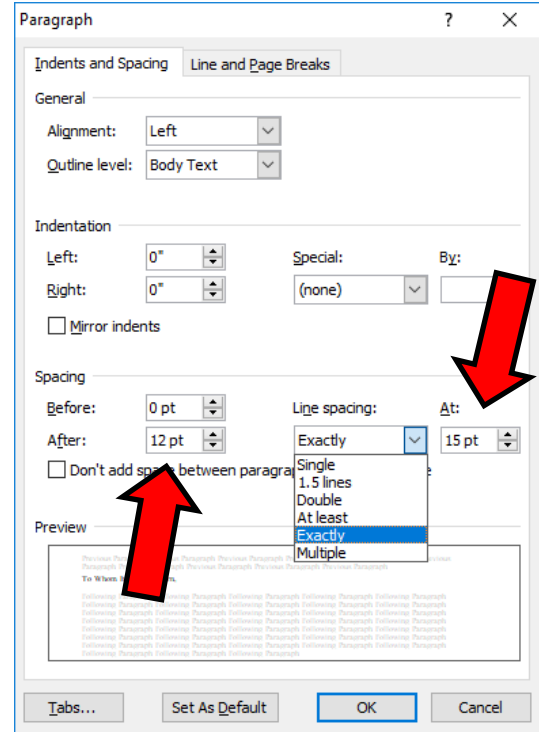
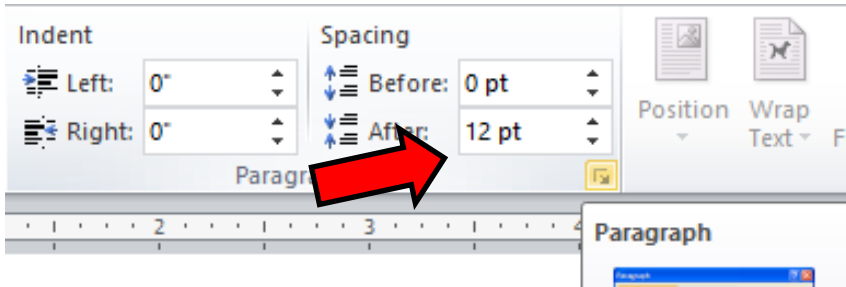


Customizing Paragraph and Line Spacing

How to Set up 15-point Line Spacing

In Word:

Use the “Paragraph” customization tool under “Page Layout” to change both line and paragraph spacing:

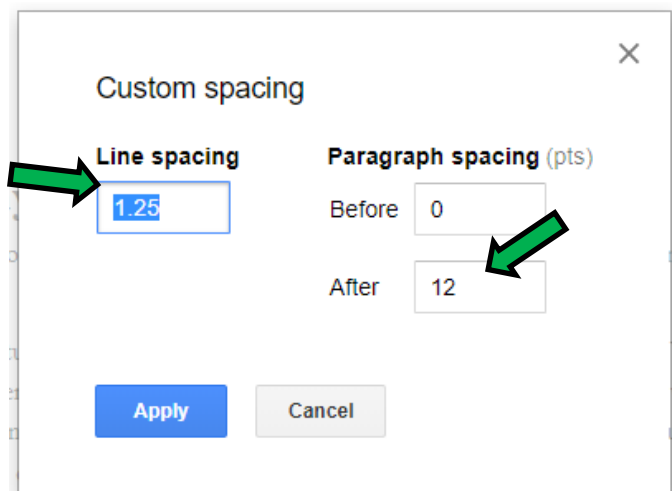
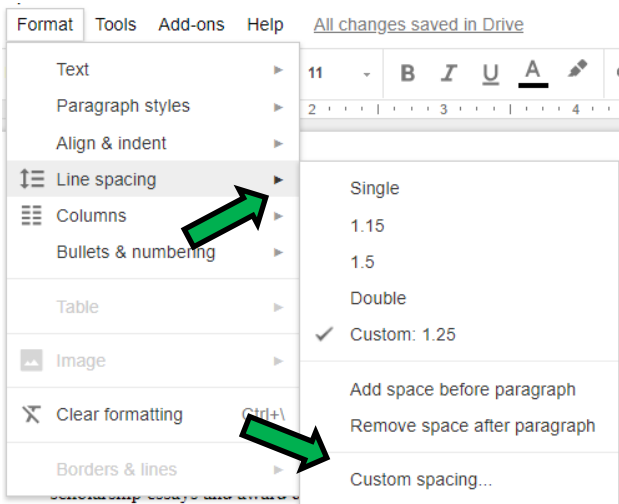


In Pages (iOS):

Click the pop-up menu below Spacing, then choose an option (if you don't see a pop-up menu below Spacing, click the disclosure triangle to expand it). Choose **Exactly**, and click the arrows next to the spacing field to set the amount of spacing to 15 pts.

In Google Docs:

Click the “Format” menu, then highlight “Line spacing.” From here, click “Custom Spacing” to set both the line and paragraph spacing. Google uses a mathematic tool to set spacing. For size 11 or 12 font, use 1.25 line spacing. Click “Apply.”



Sample Print Essay Heading & Spacing

*** Sample MLA Heading ***

Jessica A. Student
State of California Memorial Scholarship
Application Essay
1 August 2017

Dreams in the Attic

The gripping first line of this essay is indented, since it will be printed and read like any essay in class. The spacing is tight, allowing for up to 500 words on one page, but also leaves some white space between lines so my reader's eyes don't begin to hurt.

With 12-point paragraph spacing, there is also a considerable amount of white space between paragraphs, giving the reader a clear signal that a new section of the story is beginning. |

General Tips and Guidelines

- Only use a heading if the prompt doesn't specify what to do.
- Titles are optional unless otherwise instructed. A strong title can really give your essay a strong start; a bland, forgettable title, however, should be omitted.
- Format is not a place where you should take risks or think out of the box. Format affects the reader's immediate, instant reaction to you and your professional brand. With clean and professional format, you win your reader's trust. With strange, confusing, or out-of-place decisions, you set the reader on edge, and he/she will be looking for a reason to eliminate you, *not* to promote you to the winner's circle.
- Margins should be at 1" on all four sides – this provides an invisible white "picture frame," holding your essay like a piece of professional art
- Depending on your preferred word processor (Word, Pages, Google Docs, etc), create an essay "template" and save it under the name "Scholarship Essay Template." In this document, set everything the way it should be – font, size, spacing, margins, heading, and so on. Then, each time you start a new essay, open "Scholarship Essay Template" and save it as a new document. This way you don't have to re-do all of your formatting with each essay!
- Don't sweat the formatting – just keep it clean, simple, and professional, and your essays will look fantastic!



Structure

The world's greatest storytellers have a secret that most readers aren't aware of: Structure!

Story Structure is how a storyteller assembles the pieces of his or her story in order to make the story flow well for the reader. Without effective structure and flow, the story will feel strange or even false to the reader, and your reader won't feel and act as you want them to.

The best stories follow what is commonly known as the "5-Act Structure."

- **Act 1:** Every story has a beginning, in which the conflict (**problem**) is established.
- **Act 2:** By pursuing his or her **goal**, the hero makes **choices** that do not work, complicating the **problem**.
- **Act 3:** The hero makes a **sacrificial choice** that causes everything to change.
- **Act 4:** The immediate fallout from the sacrificial choice, or falling action, shows itself in the form of a new pattern of habits (**goals** and **choices**) that work toward a better future.
- **Act 5:** As the conflict (**problem**) is resolved once and for all, something of both tangible and intangible value is gained and reflected upon.

Act 1 / Paragraph 1: Begin with a short paragraph that establishes the **problem** or unattained **goal**, relevant to the prompt. It's best to begin with a strong, concise statement about this problem. Don't begin with a quote from someone else, an introduction to who you are ("Hi, my name is Bob and I'm applying..."), or something bland like, "This is an essay about a goal I achieved...." Begin by diving right into the conflict.

Act 2 / Paragraph 2: Vividly describe a first **choice** that you thought would achieve the **goal** or overcome the **obstacle**, but did not. Add a note about how this complicated the **problem** further. The reason that this first choice doesn't work should be because it isn't selfless enough, or it lacks the vision/wisdom to be successful, requiring you to humbly reach out for help. This is an important place to make sure that your anecdote is in strict alignment with the prompt and the scholarship sponsor's goals.

Acts 3 and 4/ Paragraph 3: In your longest paragraph, illustrate a **sacrificial choice** that resolves the **problem**. Set this as a scene, with a specific setting in a specific moment. It is wise to include at least one other character, with whom you have a significant **relationship** that is impacted by your choice. Begin sharing how this choice caused your behavior (**goals**, followed by **choices** that aren't as negatively affected by **flaws**) changed for the better.

Act 5 / Paragraph 4: Illustrate how the conflict was resolved by reflecting on your **growth** in this process. Remember, growth is a way of looking at **change**, or your transformation from Person A into Person B, who should be more selfless, wise, compassionate, helpful, devoted, studious, careful, loving, than Person A. Reconnect the entire story, and your reflection, to the prompt and the mission of the scholarship sponsor, making it abundantly clear that you are the ideal candidate for the scholarship because you are the living embodiment of their mission and values.

