Formatting an Academic Paper

This handout will provide guidance in formatting an academic paper: how to set up document margins, indentations, font, alignment, page numbers, and document and paragraph spacing in Microsoft Word **(Note: this is a guide for standard setup. If a student writer's professor gives specific instruction for an academic paper format, follow the instructed guidelines on the assignment's rubric).**

Document Margins

Final papers should have 1" margins on all sides. This can be changed by going to the "Layout" tab and changing the Top, Bottom, Left, and Right margins to 1", or by going to Format > Document in the menu bar and changing the margins there. Make sure the gutter is set to 0".

Indentations

The first line of every new paragraph should automatically indent. If this is not the default setting, change the indentation format for a document by clicking Format > Paragraph in the menu bar. Look under the "Special" drop-down menu in the Indentation section, and select "First Line." This setting automatically indents the first line so that student writers don't have to do it manually.

Font

Academic papers should be written in an academic font: either Times New Roman or Cambria. All papers should also be written with 12-point font. (Note: Times New Roman and Cambria are the default fonts for Microsoft Word, and 12-point font is also the default setting for font size).

Alignment

The text of your paper should be left aligned, NOT justified, as justified text is hard to read if it hasn't been professionally typeset. The default in Word is left alignment so don't change it.

Page Numbers

Go to View menu and choose "Header and Footer." You'll see a header box appear at the top and a footer box at the bottom. Click in the header box, type your last name (or title), make it align to the right, and then select Page Numbers from the Insert menu.When finished, click on the "Close" tab under the Header view. Each page of the document should now display a page number at the upper right that updates automatically when changes are made to the document. It will appear as grayed out text unless you active the Header and Footer tool to make changes.

Document Spacing

The entire paper should be double-spaced, including the heading and bibliography. Choose Edit > Select All > Format > Paragraph and choose "double" from the "line spacing" menu in the Spacing section.

Paragraph Spacing

Papers should have no extra spacing after paragraphs. This should be the default for Word, but if your default setting is to have 10pt spacing after paragraphs, change your default. Go to the menu bar and click Format > Style make sure "Normal" is selected from the list of styles, and click "modify." In the lower left corner, select the dropdown menu that starts with "Format" and drag down to Paragraph. In the paragraph settings menu that pops up, change the settings for Spacing After to 0pt.