Clever and Descriptive Title

This is a sample of a properly formatted paper. The text of this paper describes important points for correct MLA style formatting. Since most students use MS Word to write their essays and since that software is available on computers in all of UNLV’s campus computer labs, this paper will describe how to use MS Word’s features to format a paper correctly.

The first important point involves the heading in the upper-left corner of the first page. It contains four items: the student’s name, the instructor’s name, the course number, and the due date for the assignment. Each item must be on a separate line, and they should appear in the same order in which they are listed in this paragraph. The section number which appears after the course number is not always required; check with the course’s instructor. If the instructor provides no specific information or has no preference, the best guideline is to provide just enough information to distinguish your particular class from all others. If you are enrolled in ENG 475, and only one section of that course is offered that semester, then the course number alone is likely enough information. If you are enrolled in ENG 101, and there are 35 sections, then providing the section is likely a good idea.

The title should appear immediately following the heading. It should be centered. In MS Word 2007, the appropriate method for centering text is to select it and then press the “Center Text” button. This button appears in the “Home” tab, in the section labeled “Paragraph.” Alternatively, you may use the “Center Text” shortcut key, CTRL+E. Do not try to center your
title by using a series of tabs. The first letter of each major word of your title should be capitalized. The first letter of the first word of the title should also be capitalized, even if it is merely an indirect article.

Notice also that the paper uses Times New Roman font, size 12. For MS Word 2007, the default setting is Calibri font, size 11. You may wish to change this default setting so that you don’t have to change the font and size every time you start a new paper. Notice also that this font and size applies to the entire paper, including the heading, the header, the title, the essay itself, and the works cited page.

The margins for the paper should be set to one inch on all sides, including the top and bottom. For MS Word 2007, this is the default setting. For MS Word 2003, the default setting for left and right margins is 1.25” and you must change it manually. Again, you may find it is easier simply to set a new default. In MS Word 2003, change the setting by going to the “Page Setup” window, under the file menu. Under the “Margins” tab, you can set each margin individually. In MS Word 2007, go to the “Page Layout” tab. In the “Page Setup” section, click on “Margins.” Select “Normal.” The fact that this option sets each margin to one inch should be clearly indicated when you move the mouse over “Normal.”

Look at the header in the upper-right corner of this page. It contains the student’s last name and no punctuation. Notice that this is in the “header” and not in the body of the paper. This approach keeps the header in place and the pages numbered correctly even if you edit and revise your paper. In MS Word 2007, go to the “Insert” tab, click “Header” and select the “Blank” option. Return to the “Home” tab while the cursor is in the header section. Click on the “Align Text Right” button. Again, do not try to move the text to the right side of the page by using a series of tabs. After typing your last name (and pressing the spacebar), go to the “Insert”
tab and select “Page Number,” then “Current Position,” then “Plain Number.” Use “Current Position” instead of “Top of Page” because it ensures the page number appears immediately after your name and the space. Also, make sure the header is the same font as the rest of the paper. MLA guidelines suggest that the header should appear on every page. Some instructors request that the header not appear on the first page; since the heading appears on the first page, the header is redundant. If your instructor prefers not to have the header appear on the first page, then before creating the header, go to the “Page Layout” tab and open the “Page Setup” window by clicking on the small square to the right of the words “Page Setup.” Click on the “Layout” tab, and in the “Headers and Footers” section, check the box labeled “Different first Page.” Now, when you click the “Header” button on the “Insert” tab, the header section on the first page will be labeled “First Page Header,” and the header section on all subsequent pages will be labeled “Header.” Type your header on any page after the first.

The entire paper should be double-spaced. This includes the heading, the title, each paragraph of the essay, the spacing between the header and the title, the spacing between the title and the first paragraph, the spacing between paragraphs, and the works cited page. The easiest way to double space a document in MS Word is to select all the text (CTRL+A) and then use the double-spacing shortcut key (CTRL+2). If, after using those shortcuts, you notice extra space in places it obviously doesn’t belong (e.g. between paragraphs, between the lines of the heading, before or after the title), that issue may be caused a paragraph formatting setting. In MS Word 2007, go to the “Home” tab and open the paragraph formatting window by clicking the small box to the right of the word “Paragraph.” The third section of this window is labeled “Spacing.” To the right, there is a dropdown menu that should be set to “Double” if you have already used the shortcut keys described earlier in this paragraph. If you do not wish to use shortcut keys, you
may set your paper to double-spacing using that dropdown menu. To the left of the “Spacing” section, there are two boxes labeled “Before” and “After.” Make sure they are both set to zero. You may need to have the full text of the essay selected (use CTRL+A) while adjusting that setting to make sure it applies to the full paper. Again, it may be a good idea to change the default setting on your copy of MS Word so you don’t have to make this change every time you write a paper. If you have all these settings applied correctly, there should be exactly the same amount of whitespace between paragraphs as there is between lines within a paragraph. Do not forget that the works cited page should also use standard double-spacing.

The Works Cited page should be a separate page. The easiest way to start a new page at the end of your essay is go to the “Insert” tab and click “Page Break.” The header should appear in the upper-right corner of the Works Cited page and should continue the page numbering from the essay. The words “Works Cited” should appear at the top of the page, centered. See the paragraph on titles, above, for instructions on centering text. Use the words “Works Cited” even if you only have one entry. The entries should be listed alphabetically based on the first word in each entry. The first line of each entry should begin at the left margin, and all subsequent lines should be indented. This technique makes it easier to skim the first words of the entries quickly.
Works Cited