Hanging Indents: Using Microsoft Word to Format Your Documentation

By Mr. Jay Brandes, Global Campus Librarian, Troy University. Updated February 20, 2015.

In the body of a research paper, you document information sources (books, articles, motion pictures, etc.) with a brief citation. For example:

A quotation from a book followed by a Modern Language Association (MLA) style citation looks like this: “A merry little surge of electricity piped in by automatic alarm from the mood organ beside the bed awakened Rick Deckard” (Dick 3).

An American Psychological Association (APA) style citation for the same quotation looks like this: “A merry little surge of electricity piped in by automatic alarm from the mood organ beside the bed awakened Rick Deckard” (Dick, 1996, p. 3).

The brief citation points the reader to the longer documentation entry at the end of the paper. The longer entry tells the reader from what source you, the writer, got your information. In MLA style papers, the longer entries at the end of the paper are labeled, Works Cited. In an APA style paper, they are titled, References.

Both types of documentation (Works Cited or References) involve hanging indentation. The hanging indent helps the reader know when one entry ends and another begins. For example:

Works Cited


PARAGRAPH SETTINGS IN MICROSOFT WORD

From the Home tab, click the down arrow (image below) to access the paragraph settings.

The Paragraph dialog box looks like this (image right).

In all of your college papers, be they MLA or APA style, the line spacing should be double and you should have told Microsoft to not add any extra space between paragraphs. These are things which you can set from the start of your paper using the Spacing settings of the Paragraph dialog box (image just below).

When you are ready to create your References or Works Cited list, use the Indentation settings of the Paragraph dialog box—simply choose “Hanging.”

Once that is set, as the text wraps from one line to the next, it will be indented an extra half an inch. When you have finished typing the entry for one information source, simply hit the enter key—the cursor will move down but will not move an extra half inch to the right, it will be flush left, ready to start the next entry.