

Being Style-ish

by
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We here at Appkickers Technology are mighty proud of our flagship productivity tools: Appkickers. Our Templates, Macros and Styles make creating and editing documents quick and easy. They help you maintain stable documents and resist formatting mistakes that cost you in time, money and elevated blood pressure.

How do they do this? Well, in large part, by using (and encouraging the continued use of) *Styles*.

I know, I know. The very mention of the word causes the uninitiated to cringe. Styles are reviled... confusing... avoided!

But embracing Styles means opening yourself to *serious* benefits:

- Styles make formatting easier,
- Styles make formatting consistent,
- Styles make changes happen quickly and easily,
- Styles make documents stable,
- Styles make documents smaller,
- Styles give you much greater control over your work product.

Styles are integral to Word. They are built into the very fabric of the program. Yes, you can avoid using them as they were designed – there are plenty of buttons on the toolbars that make that easy. In fact, Word’s interface has made it much *too* easy to forego the power of Styles. But take another look at that list. There is no doubt you will benefit from using them.

And believe it or not, Styles are just not hard to use.

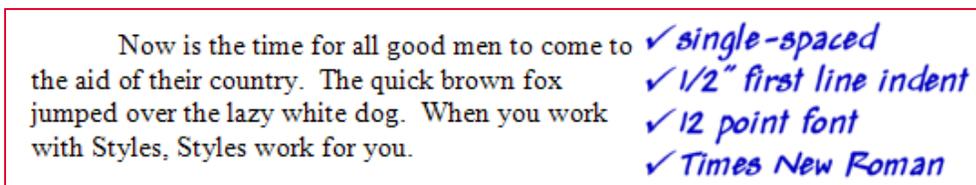
So What Are Styles?

Simply put, a Style is a named collection of formatting choices – something like a beach ball:



The beach ball is blue, made of plastic, two feet in diameter, and has a smooth texture. These are all “attributes” of the beach ball.

Now consider this paragraph:



The Style used to format this paragraph also has attributes. They include such things as the font name and size, bold, italics and underline, indentation, line spacing, alignment, tabs, space above and below, and more. And here's the really nifty thing: the attributes of this Style can be used on other paragraphs.

You Already Use Styles... Oh, Yes You Do!

All paragraphs have a Style associated with them, whether you did the associating or not. This is very important. It'll be on the quiz.

Side note: This refers to "Paragraph" Styles. I'm stating the obvious because Styles also come in another flavor – called "Character" Styles. As the labels imply, the former is applied to an entire paragraph, and the latter to selected text. Character Styles are optional, but Paragraph Styles are mandatory. They're also much more useful.

Am I Normal?

Remember the first time you ever opened Word? You started to type and discovered that the font was 10 point Times New Roman? You were using your very first Style – called "Normal" – which is the *default* paragraph Style. Start typing and the format is determined by the Normal Style. Press the Enter key to start a new paragraph, and that new paragraph also uses the Normal Style. If you try to delete the Normal Style, you'll find you can't.

Remember: All paragraphs have a Style associated with them.

Case Study: We Don't Need No Stinkin' Styles

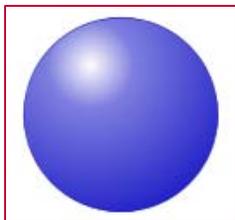
Fran M. doesn't pay attention to Styles – she just starts typing, and adds formatting as she works. She presses the enter key to add blank lines, selects text to change the font, clicks the numbering button on the Formatting toolbar, drags margins and tabs around like an Apache dancer, and so on, until the document looks pretty much the way she wants it.

She wrestles with uncooperative indents and takes an hour longer than her boss wanted. There's a lot of hand wringing and/or bad language involved. And the formatting really hits the fan when her co-worker tries to finish up the document while Fran's at lunch. Still, it gets done, and that's the goal... right?

Manual Labor

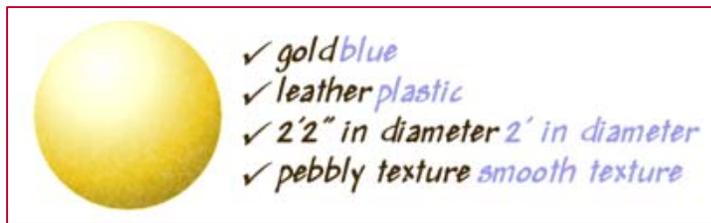
What I've just described is called "manual" formatting. It still might seem harmless to you. So let's take a peek at what Word is doing under the hood. We'll take the example of the beach ball a little farther and pretend it's like a Word document:

My boss came in this morning and said I need to get that beach ball out to a client today. So I work like a busy, busy bee and present her with a lovely blue beach ball.



My boss looks it over and says she doesn't think it's appropriate for our client – and gives me a bunch of different attributes for it. So... I "reformat" the beach ball – cover it with pebbly leather and color it gold. I fill it with more air so it's bigger.

While we would never do this to a beach ball, it's done all the time to Word documents.



Note the ghost of the blue attributes in the illustration – I didn't *replace* blue with gold, or plastic with leather – I told Word to *ignore* the blue and use gold instead. The ball is still blue and smooth beneath the gold leather. *I added manual formatting on top of the Style's formatting.*

Can Word reconcile this? Sure it can – until it can't. This is how documents get bigger, and why indents change unexpectedly, and why that 40-page brief (or proposal, or contract) just won't open today, and why numbering goes haywire. Well, numbering goes haywire for a couple of reasons – but this is a big one.

And even if nothing ever goes wrong with the document, it's still difficult for one person to work on another person's document. Manual formatting is rarely applied consistently, and Word hides formatting codes from you very effectively, so it's hard to tell what you've done when it's time to edit.

Manual Labor v. Going In Style

Even though manual formatting seems easier, it actually causes you to work harder and longer.

Every paragraph comes fully loaded with information about how it should look and print, courtesy of its Style. When you change something manually, you're laying information over the top of the existing Style formatting.

However... when you change the Style itself, you are adding not one byte of excess information to your document. You are truly replacing one attribute with another.

Are there times when you need the flexibility to change something just once – to underline a word, or center a line? Yes. But learn to use that flexibility for good and not for evil.

Case Study: May The Styles Be With You

Lisa S. uses Styles. Lisa has Office XP and clicks *Format > Styles and Formatting...* to display the Styles and Formatting Pane down the right side of her program window. This makes using and editing Styles much easier for her. (When she used Word 2000, Lisa would click the Styles drop-down at the left end of the Formatting toolbar to quickly apply Styles, and *Format > Styles* to edit them.)

She changes a Style by clicking the down arrow and clicking Modify to open the Modify Styles dialog box. The single change flows through her entire document, to every single paragraph formatted with that Style. Efficient, huh? And easy.

In Conclusion

Styles save you time, save your documents, save your sanity. Next time we'll take a look at various tricks and shortcuts for working with Styles in Word. You might also want to visit us at appkickers.com to see how we've added even better tools in Appkickers 5.0 to help you tame Styles.

Pop Quiz

Complete this sentence: Every paragraph has a _____.

Answer

If you said "Style," give yourself a gold star.

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