A number of students have contacted us about formatting issues. Some students are wondering why formatting is important, and why we are deducting points for formatting errors. Some students are still not certain about how to make sure all formatting specifications are met. Read through the information in this document for answers to your questions and for further formatting advice and strategies.

**WHY IS FORMATTING IMPORTANT?**
**WHY ARE POINTS BEING DEDUCTED FOR FORMATTING ERRORS?**

In the largest sense of learning and achievement, content is the most significant aspect of your papers. Formatting details can seem to be a tedious addition to an already complex process of writing a college-level paper that is well-researched, well-detailed, informative, and interesting. However, outside and inside academia (and, yes, formatting is important outside of academia) formatting requirements can “make-or-break” a professional paper’s (or grant application’s, or graduate application’s, or report’s) impact and success in this major way: especially in engineering, technology, and the sciences, if a paper (report, application, etc.) is submitted with any incorrect formatting, it will, at best, be send back for revision, and, at worst (and this actually happens all the time), simply be sent back, unread, with no opportunity to resubmit. If an author has met formatting specifications, it is a sign that the author has been attentive to all the requirements of a writing situation. An author who follows formatting specifications is an author that readers will be inclined to respect, right from the first glance at his or her paper.

The 3 points we take off for formatting errors are a reminder, then, to pay careful attention to all requirements, including formatting, because paying attention to such requirements will be professionally very important. There is also a sense, in engineering, science, and technology, of the importance of precision. Paying attention to precision specs in formatting is good practice for paying attention to precision specs in any professional situation—in the lab, in the field, in programming, in design, in construction— and your attention to such specs indicates your professionalism and reliability when it comes to careful attention to details. This attention to detail in your papers, then, is not solely the view or requirement of English professors, this is the experience of all the engineers and engineering faculty you are working with and learning from.

Your writing instructors continue to work closely with Dr. Budny and your engineering instructors to create and maintain a firm and fair experience of communication situations you will experience throughout your academic and professional careers. Check the websites listed below; you will see that engineering conferences and publications have formatting specifications that must be met. You will also see that the formatting specifications for your papers are similar to the paper submission formats required by most professional engineering organizations and publications.

http://www.cs.sfu.ca/~vis/Tasks/camera.html
http://www.asme.org/Publications/ConfProceedings/Author/Formatting_Paper.cfm
http://embs.papercept.net/conferences/support/support.php
http://pubs.asce.org/authors/journal/
http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/107061889/home/ForAuthors.html?CRETRY=1&SRETRY=0

SCROLL DOWN FOR SPECIFIC ADVICE
ADVICE FOR ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING CORRECT FORMATTING

You have several useful resources at-hand for executing correct formatting.

• Use the formatting template found under Paper Format Guidelines on the Writing Projects page. You can use this template in two ways:

  − Use the “style guides.” Instructions for using the style guides are within the template, itself
  
  − Use the template as “cut-and-paste” template for formatting your own content. This works particularly well for the body of your paper. Select and copy text from the draft of your paper. Select and “cut” a portion of the body text of the template. Replace the template text with your copied text by “pasting” your copied text into the now blank body text area of the template. Your text—even if it was single-spaced and in a different font in your draft—will now be correctly formatted. Continue to do chunks of “cutting and pasting” in this way, and you should end up with all body text correctly formatted. Then, you will want to check to see if your titles, headings, etc. are correct.

• Use the formatting instructions detailed in the template:

For any aspect of your paper: title, headings, body text, references, margins, spacing, check the specifications and use your menu options to establish or correct formatting. Remember, the default settings in Word (no matter which version of Word you are using) may not provide the correct formatting. So, you may need to reset defaults, and/or “manually” select the correct setting by using the appropriate menus and options.

For example:

  − for margins, you will need to go to the Format menu, click on Document, and set the correct margins (Top and Bottom 1.0; Left and Right .075) in the “Margins” window. For correct columns, you will need to go to the Format menu, click on Columns, and set the appropriate 2 column width (3.4) and spacing (0.2)
  
  − for the main title, you will need to go to the Format menu, click on Font, select Times New Roman, select 14 pt., and select Bold, and select All Caps. These selections will ensure your main title is correctly formatted
  
  − for headings, you will again go to Format, then Font. Now, you will make sure your font size is 12 pt.; you will select bold, and Small Caps
  
  − for body text, go to Format, then Paragraph. For Alignment, select Justified. For Indent, select 0” (manually indent all paragraphs after the initial paragraph of a section). For Spacing, select 0 pt Before, 0 pt After, Single Line spacing, and check Don’t add space between paragraphs of the same style
  
  − For References, you will need to change the font size. Go to Format, click on Font, select 8 from Size.

• Use toolbars and keyboard commands

Most of the above formatting settings can also be established and changed by using your toolbars (and, for Mac users, your Formatting Palette) and/or keyboard commands. For example:

  − if you select a portion of your body text, then click on the toolbar icon for “justify” (the one in which all the lines are even), that selected area of text will be fully justified
  
  − if you highlight a line of text and click command-b, that line will be “bolded”
  
  − if you select all of your references, and select, on the toolbar, 8 for font size, all of your References will be changed to the correct 8 pt. specification.
• Allow time for formatting; don’t guess; don’t assume; do double check

You now have quite a bit of advice and numerous strategies for correctly completing the formatting task. Follow the advice, employ the strategies that work best for you. And remember:

– don’t guess about what is correct

– don’t assume everything is correct without double-checking

– use the template, visually, to make sure everything on your paper looks just like everything on the template.

– take a look back at your Paper #2 to see what formatting errors were made, and be sure those same errors are not being made again

If you have further formatting questions, ask your writing instructor.