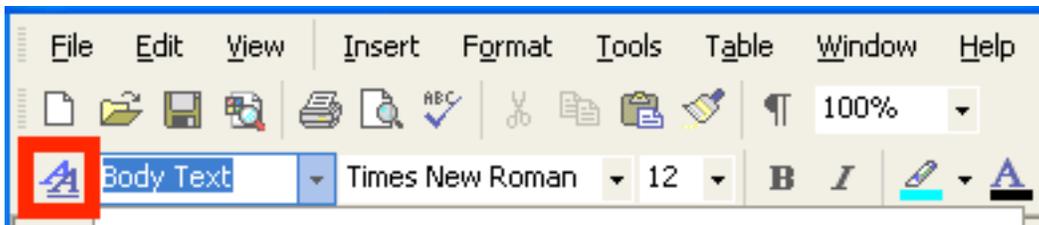# Ten things every Microsoft Word user should know

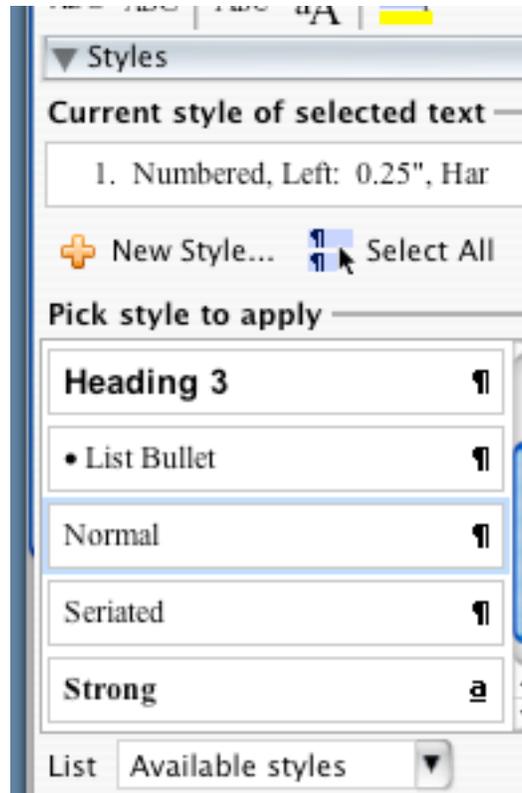*By J: generaldisarray.wordpress.com*

1. Styles

The first five tips introduce and explain the use of styles in Word. Styles are user-defined formats that control the look and feel of paragraphs, characters, tables and lists. By creating styles and assigning them to the elements of your document, you can more easily control your document's formatting.
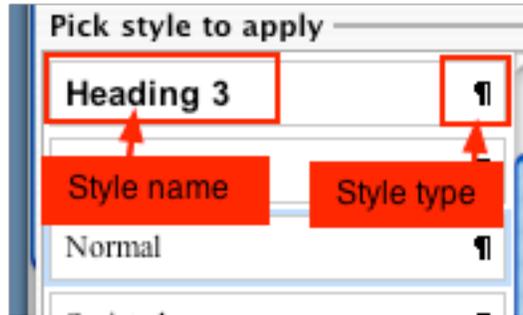
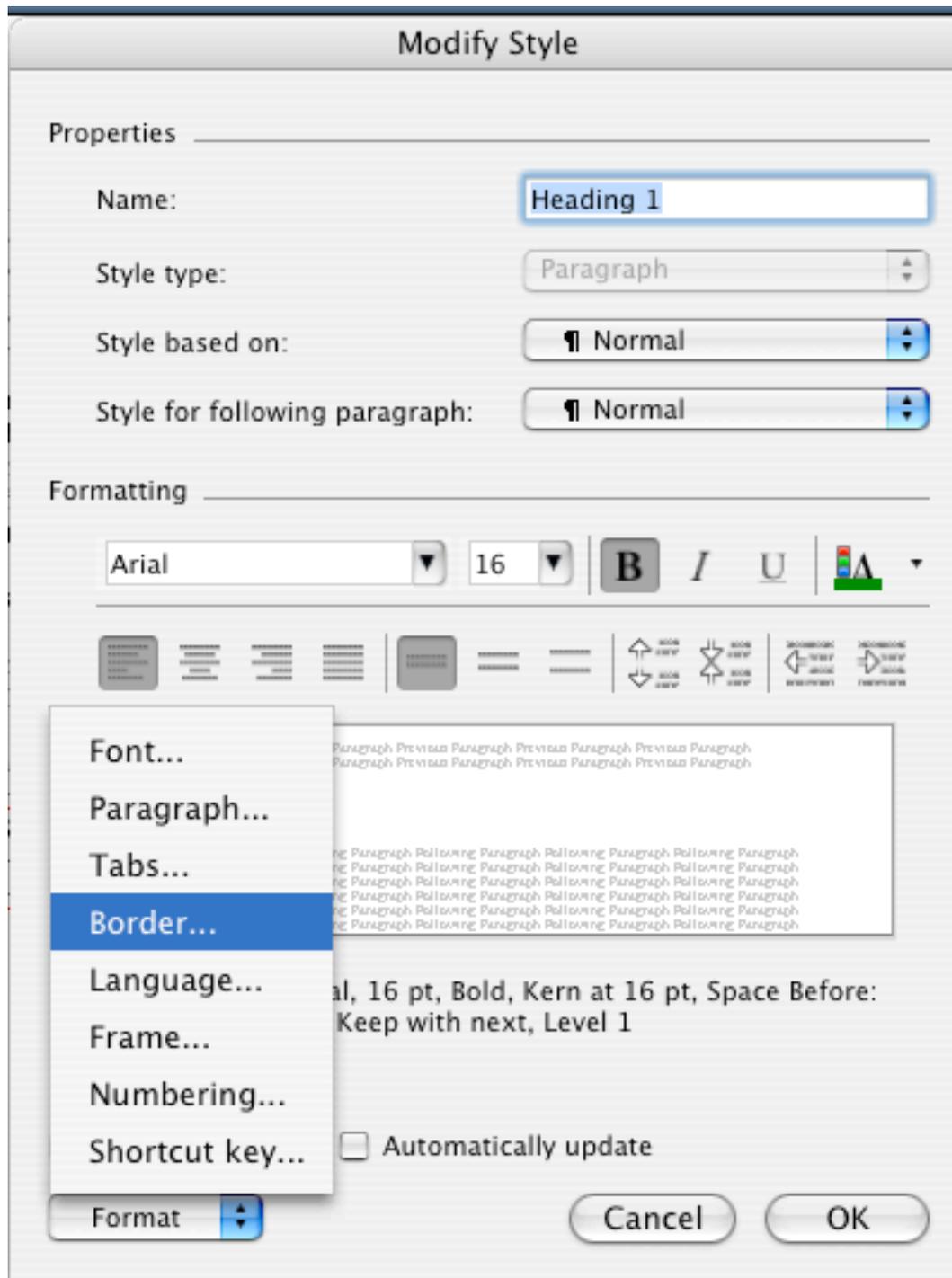In Windows, the Styles pane can be turned on by clicking on the "AA" button on the *Formatting* toolbar:

On the Mac, the Styles pane is one of the modules on the *Formatting* palette. On either OS, the pane looks something like this:

The functions of the different parts of the pane are obvious. Current style of selected text shows either the style currently in use, or a summary of the formatting if the selected text doesn't use a style. The options under *Pick style to apply* are either default or user-defined styles. Using the *List* dropdown, you can change which styles are shown in the *Pick style* list.

Clicking on a style name applies that style to the selected text. Clicking on the *Style type* icon allows you to modify the style. The *Modify Style* dialog allows you to change every aspect of that style (font, paragraph formatting, and more, depending on the type of style selected).

Modify Style

Properties

Name: Heading 1

Style type: Paragraph

Style based on: ¶ Normal

Style for following paragraph: ¶ Normal

Formatting

Arial   16   **B**   *I*   U   A

Font...
Paragraph...
Tabs...
Border...
Language...
Frame...
Numbering...
Shortcut key...

Paragraph Previous Paragraph Previous Paragraph Previous Paragraph
Paragraph Previous Paragraph Previous Paragraph Previous Paragraph

ng Paragraph Following Paragraph Following Paragraph Following Paragraph
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al, 16 pt, Bold, Kern at 16 pt, Space Before:
Keep with next, Level 1

☐ Automatically update

Format

Cancel   OK

For example, the next two images show the same text. The first has indented paragraphs; the second has unindented paragraphs with a 12pt space between them. Rather than creating this formatting manually, the entire page was changed from the 1st to the 2nd style by editing the *Normal* style from *Paragraph: Indentation: First Line: .5in* to no paragraph indentation, but *Paragraph: Spacing: After: 12pt*. Note that on the second example, while it looks like there is a blank line between the paragraphs, there isn't -- the

cursor automatically goes from one paragraph to another, leaving a blank space that is the same height as a line of text between.

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Praesent nec pede. Suspendisse feugiat commodo justo. Suspendisse vulputate elit at orci. Etiam ornare, lectus a cursus commodo, est eros adipiscing metus, commodo interdum sem ante in tortor. Fusce eleifend leo. Donec accumsan turpis a eros. Proin pulvinar,

Okay, that introduces styles. Now on to the good stuff.

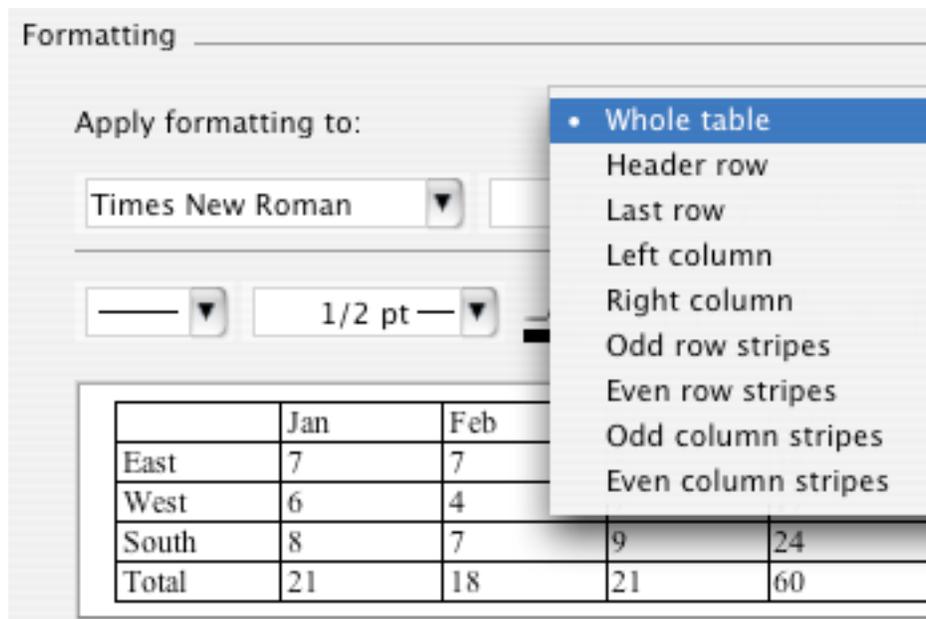**2. Header styles and the Table of Contents**

If you wanted the first-level header for your document to be Times New Roman, 16pt, bold and centered, you could easily create a new style with that formatting. However, Word has 9 built-in heading styles. They may not look the way you want them to out of the box, but you can easily change them to reflect your preferred formatting.

Why use these styles? If you use the built-in header styles, Word will recognize the *structure* of your document. This means that Word will know that you are typing a header, a subheader, a subsubheader, etc. It also means that, when you're done typing your document, you can create an automatic table of contents by selecting *Insert > Field > Index and Tables > TOC*. You can even have Word automatically number your headings by editing the numbering styles from the *Modify Styles* dialog.

3. Table styles

If you produce documents that contain many tables, you're probably familiar with the tedium of formatting table after table after table. Using table styles can make this process substantially easier.

To create a default table style, modify the *Table Grid* style. When you edit a table style, you can define separate styles for the header row, even and odd rows, the left and right columns, etc. So if you want the header row to be bold with a double border, and the rest of the table to be normally weighted with no border, you can edit the *Table Grid* style so that any table inserted into the document will automatically have that form.
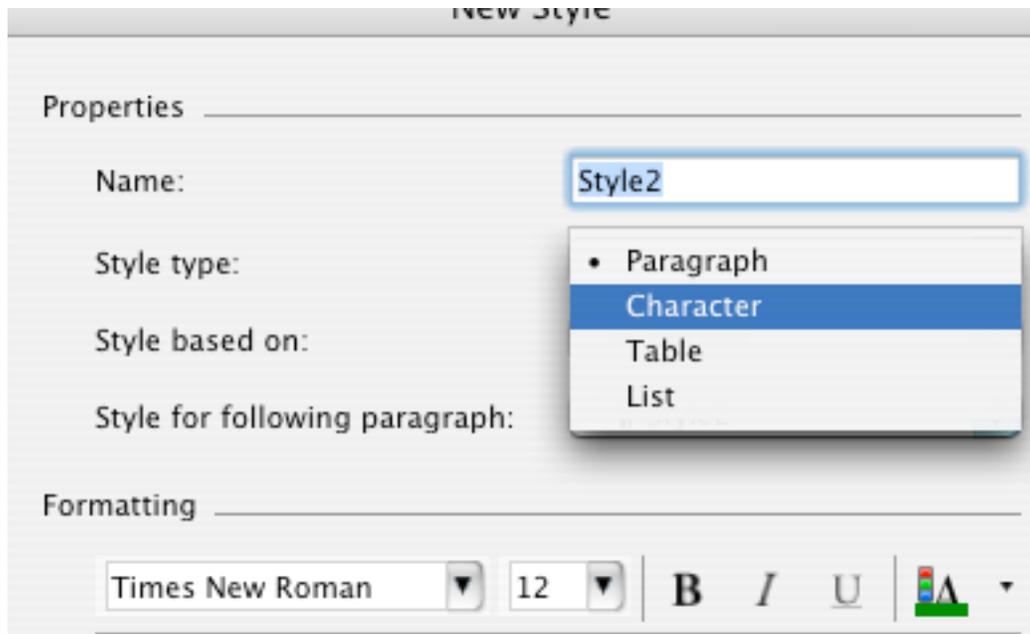

You can make additional modifications to the table after the general *Table Grid* style has been applied.

4. Character styles

Say, for example, you are creating a document that uses code examples (like HTML). You may want to set any code examples in a monotype font when referencing them within a sentence. The old-fashioned way to do this is to select *Font > Courier New*, type your code, then revert back to the old font. This can become tedious, and if you wanted to

change the code tips to another font, you'd have to manually edit every instance of Courier New in your document.

Instead, you could create a new character style by selecting *New Style* from the *Formatting* pane and setting *Style type* to *character*. Change the font to Courier and now, anytime you want to refer to a piece of code within a paragraph, you can type the code fragment, select it, and select the style that you just created. Only the selected text will be changed.

The difference between a character style and a paragraph style is that choosing a character style only affects the selected text, while choosing a paragraph style changes all of the text in the paragraph containing the selection to that style.

5. Line and page breaks

Have you ever inserted a table or a graphic into a Word document only to find that a new page starts right after the heading but before the table or graphic? The natural thing to do in this situation is to insert an extra carriage return or a page break right before the heading to ensure that both the heading and the table/graphic appear on the same page, right? But what happens when, later on, you're making changes and add a new paragraph before the table heading? Now there is too much space between the table header and the paragraph that precedes it. And before you can finalize your document, you have to visually inspect and manually edit every page of your document to make sure that there are no other instances of the same problem.

There is an easy, styles-based solution to this problem. First, define a new style for table/graphic headers (or use the automatic style, described in part 6). Then, in the *Modify Style* dialog, select *Format > Paragraph* and click on the *Line and Page Breaks* tab.

Check the box marked *keep with next*. Now, if Word encounters a situation where the paragraph/table/image/etc. after the header is going to start on a new page, it will make sure that the header is also on the new page. This also works for section headers.

Also, in the *Line and Page Breaks* tab, note the *Page break before* option. Selecting this option will ensure that elements of the current style will begin a new page. This is useful if, for example, you want new Heading 1 elements to always start a new page.

6. Captions and cross references

Once again, imagine that you are creating a document with many tables. The low-tech way to number your tables is to hard-code the table numbers into their headers ("Table 1: Blah...") and refer to tables using those manually assigned numbers ("Table 1 shows that..."). But what happens if, halfway through your document, you realize that you need a new table between Table 14 and Table 15. Now you have to renumber every table after Table 15. This could take a long time if you have, say, 50 tables, and the likelihood that you'll miss an in-text reference is fairly high.

Word has an automatic table/figure numbering feature, however. Instead of manually creating a table header with a number, you could select the entire table, right click, and choose *Caption*. This will open a dialog that allows you to automatically insert a "Label-Number" caption, with control over the numbering format ("Table 1.3.4," or "Figure 5"). The caption will automatically have Word's built Caption style, which you can edit using the standard *Modify Style* dialog from the *Styles* pane. You can also choose whether the caption will be placed above or below the table or figure.

But what about those in-text references to tables and figures. Easy. Choose I*nsert > Cross reference* and select the table or figure that you want to refer to. Word will automatically insert the text "Table X" (or "Figure X") where X is the automatically generated number of the table or figure. You can even have Word insert the entire caption, if desired. The cross reference feature also works for numbered items, footnotes, endnotes, etc., and can save a lot of time for writers creating long documents.

Tip: Sometimes the fields that display the automatic references become incorrect when new tables, figures, footnotes, etc. are inserted. Although the document will print correctly, the on-screen display will be off. To force Word to update all of these cross-reference fields, click on *Print Preview*, then close preview to view your document.

7. Turn off auto formatting

A common complaint about Word is its tendency to automatically create numbered and bulleted lists. Sometimes users want to manually make a numbered list, or begin a sentence with the "-" character without beginning a new bulleted list that uses that character. Such formatting is very easy to turn off. Select *Tools > AutoCorrect > AutoFormat* to turn off/on automatic lists, smart quotes, character-based formatting, fractions, etc.

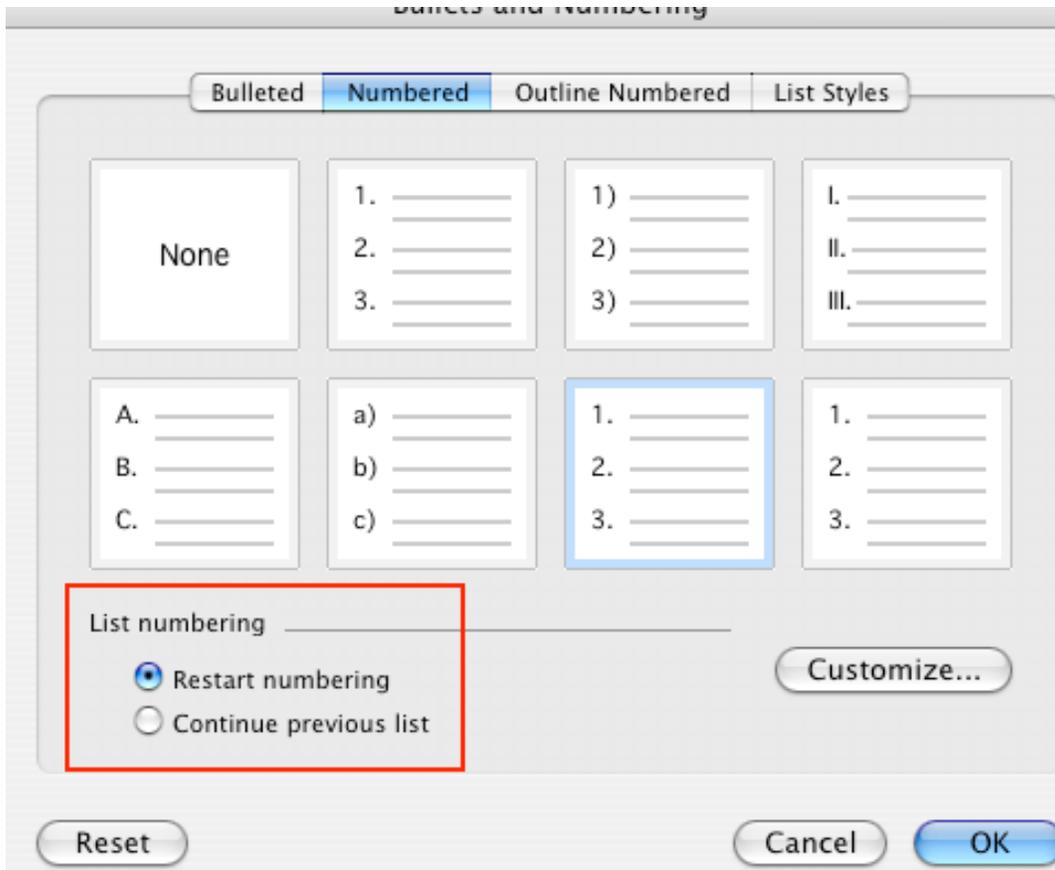**8. Character-based formatting**

But before you go rushing to the Tools menu to turn off all of the automatic formatting, consider taking a moment to learn how such formatting works. If you understand it, it could save you a lot of time. For example, by typing text surrounded by asterisks (*like this*), you can have Word make your text bold. Or, by surrounding text with the underscore character, you can have work make the selected text italic. When you don't have to take your fingers off the keyboard to apply formatting changes, you can work quite a bit faster.

9. Continue previous list

The main reason why people want to turn off automatic numbered lists is to insert indented or other text between list items:

> 7. Turning off auto formatting
> 8. auto formatting is *cool*
>
>   This is a test
>
> 9. Continue previous list
> 10. Keyboard shortcuts

This can be difficult using the automatic numbered (or bulleted) list feature because Word's default behavior is to start item number 9 after you hit return, or to begin item 8a after you hit tab. However, by creating a list using the automatic numbering function, turning the list off after the desired list item, inserting whatever needs to go before the next item, then inserting a new list, and choosing *Format > Bullets and numbering*:

and selecting *Continue previous list*, you can force the list to start at the number of the item that you left off, +1.

10. Keyboard shortcuts

Finally, a few keyboard shortcuts that might save you some time:

- Cmd+T: Hanging indent (hit Cmd+T again to increase the hanging indent; hit Cmd+Shift+T to decrease/remove the hanging indent)
- Cmd+=: Subscript (hit Cmd+= again to revert to the normal font)
- Cmd+Shift+=: Superscript
- Cmd+Shift+L: Start a bulleted list (this can also be accomplished by starting the sentence with an asterisk, assuming that this hasn't been turned off using the AutoCorrect menu)

Note: Replace Cmd with Cntrl for Windows.

Notes

- Most of these screenshots show Word running on Mac OS X, but the interfaces are very similar for recent versions of Word for Windows.

- I know, this is long, but it had to be written. I'm tired of having to collaborate with other authors that are still in the word processing Stone Age. These tips take about 5 minutes to learn, and they'll save hours over the years.
- Word is far from the only system that offers these features. Similar functionality can be found in most word processing systems, including OpenOffice.org. If you really like logical markup and automatic formatting, consider learning LaTeX. I chose to write about word because (a) Word is the most common word-processing application and (b) it's actually a pretty polished product.