

Microsoft Word for Novel Novices

Marissa Bea

Introduction

Hello! So, you've decided to write a book (memoir, novel, manifesto, what-have-you). Perhaps the ideas are swirling in your head but the idea of using word processing software feels daunting with the hundreds of how-to guides to wade through.

This guide is meant to cover the basics. This stage of your book is supposed to be rough. It won't look like a finished book, and it doesn't need to. This is where you start getting your ideas on "paper." We'll worry about making it look fancy in later guides.

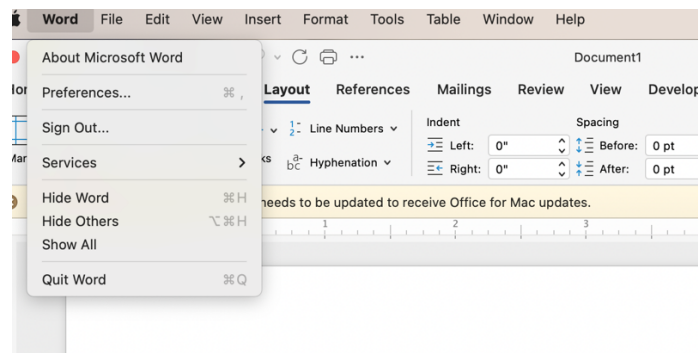
NOTE: We're going to use "book" in this guide to reference whatever you may be writing, for brevity.

Notes on Software

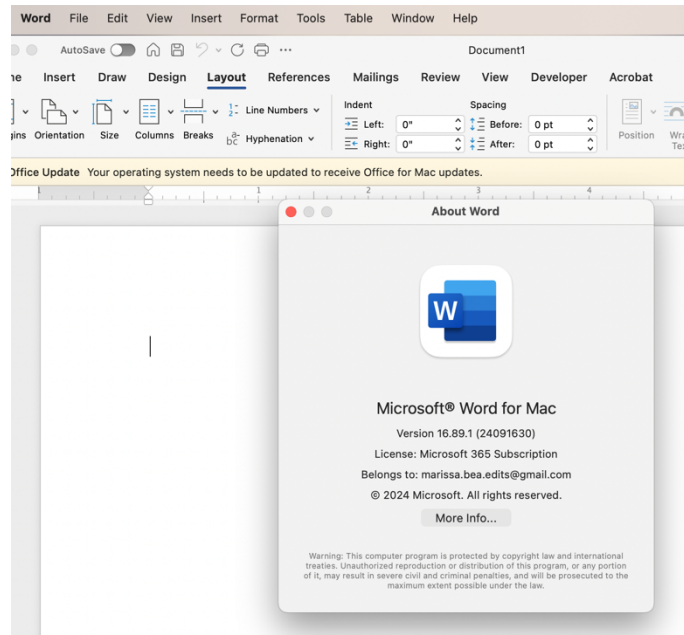
This guide will focus on using Microsoft (MS) Word as your word processing tool software. Visuals used throughout have been taken using MS Word Version 16, so if you have another version, some images may look different, but the instructions should still be relevant.

If you are unsure what version of MS Word you have, there is a drop-down menu within Word that tells you what version you have. Follow these steps to find it:

1. Click on "Word" in the uppermost toolbar.



2. Click on “About Microsoft Word.”



3. This will open a box showing which version of Word you are using.

Why is this guide using MS Word?

MS Word is considered the gold standard of word processing software. It has the most robust features and is compatible with all computer brands.

If you have Pages/Google Docs, you can still use those programs! However, this particular guide focuses on MS Word, so instructions and reference images won't match if you are using another type of software.

Let's get started!

Let's Write a Book!

This section is going to cover the most basic of basics.

- How to create a file
- Readability
- Saving your work

This will get you to a place where you can start writing with confidence!

Creating a File

To paraphrase Julie Andrews, you want to start at the very beginning. You want to write a book, so you need a piece of “paper” to start writing on.

Create a file from scratch

When you open MS Word for the first time, you will be met with a few options for templates. You want the first option called “Blank Document.” This will create a blank file that you can format to your preferences.

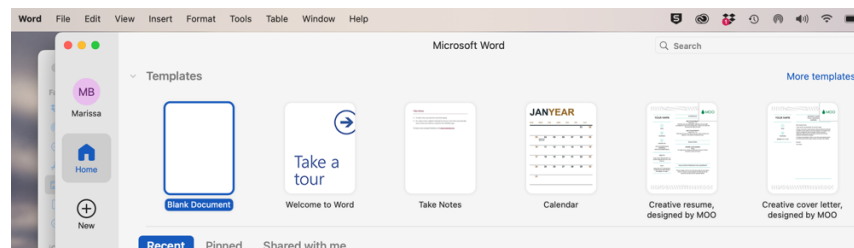
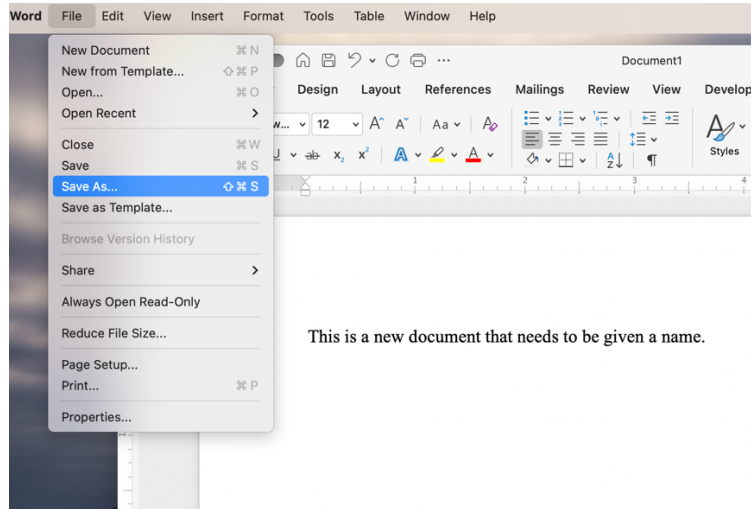


Image: screenshot showing “Blank Document” option

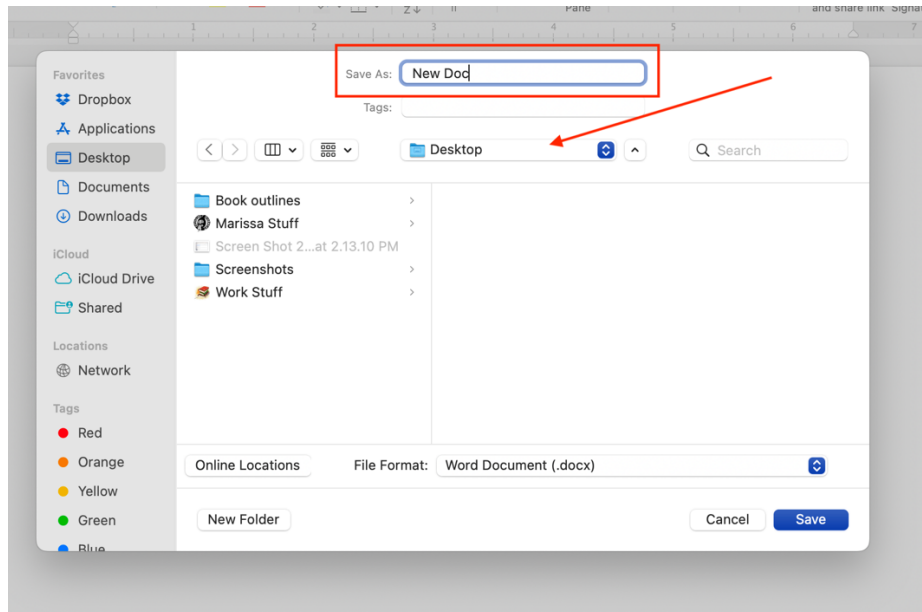
Give it a name!

As soon as you create a blank file, you want to give it a name and save it, even if you haven't written any text. Just like writing a date and time at the top of a journal entry, giving your file a name will allow you to find it later.

1. Click on “File” in the uppermost toolbar.
2. Scroll down to “Save As” and click.



3. At the top of the text box, enter a name (red box).



NOTE: Make sure you save your file to a location where you can find it again. See the red arrow above. The example is saving to the desktop but you can save to any folder.

Readability

There are basic formatting functions that will make your book easy to work with. Keep in mind, at this stage, you want your text to be easy to read for yourself and an editor. It does NOT need to be formatted like a printed book. That step comes later in the publishing process.

Spacing between lines

For best readability, your line spacing should be set to double space. This means there will be a lot of “white space” between each line.

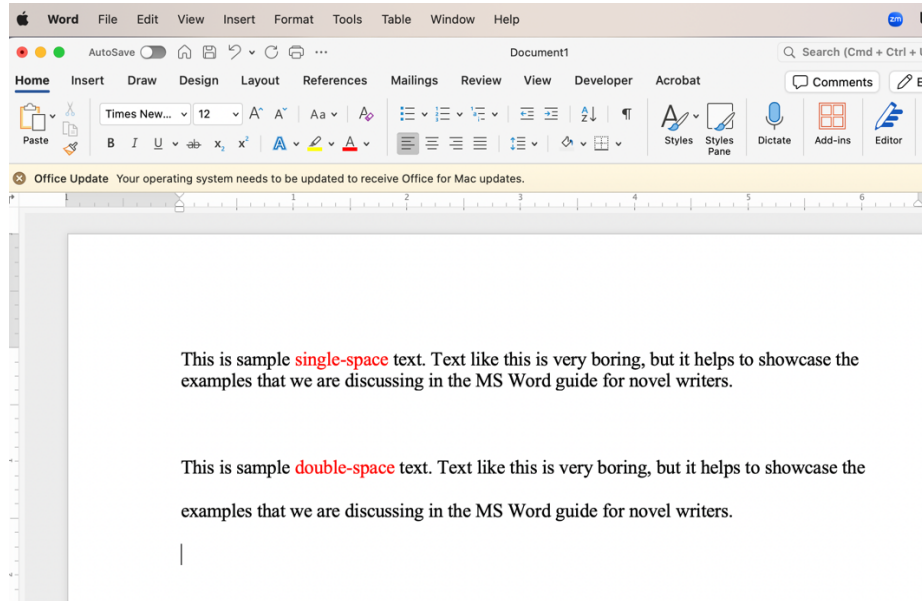
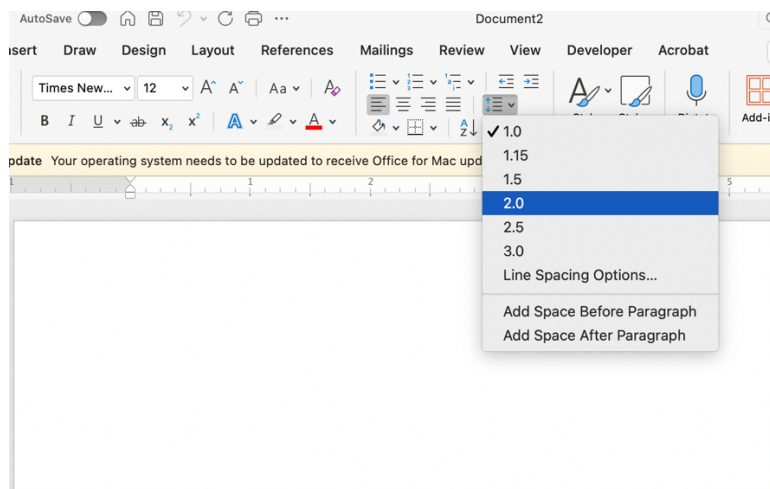


Image: screenshot showing comparison of single-space text vs. double-space text

MS Word is not automatically set to double space text, so you will need to set this.

- 1. Click on the icon showing the up/down arrows with four horizontal lines. This will show a drop-down menu.**
- 2. Click on “2.0”**



- 3. This will make your document double-spaced.**

Spaces between paragraphs

To create a new paragraph, press the “Enter” or “Return” button twice after finishing a sentence. This will create an extra line of white space, indicating a new paragraph.

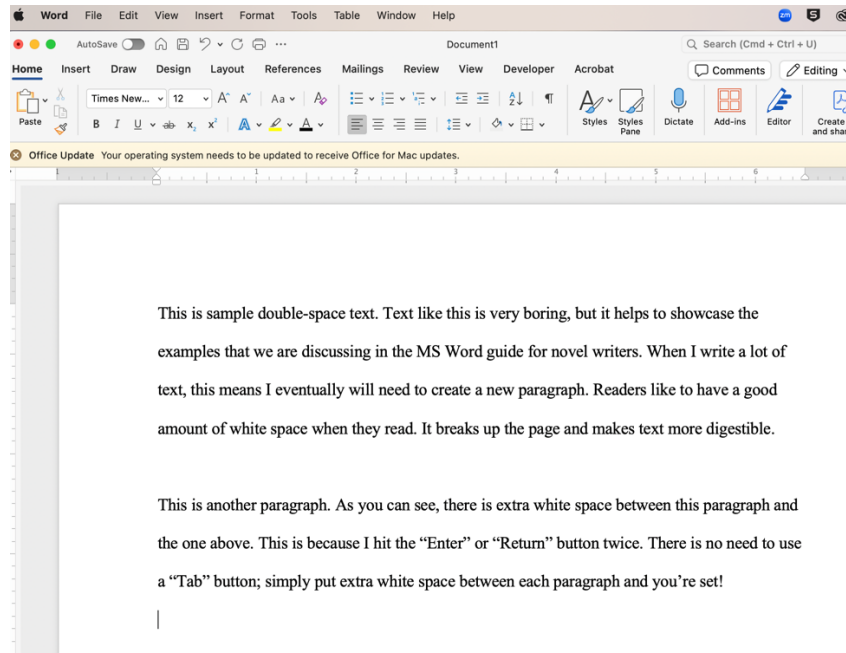


Image: Example text showing extra space between paragraphs.

Double spacing between sentences

Quick note: You do NOT need double spaces between sentences.

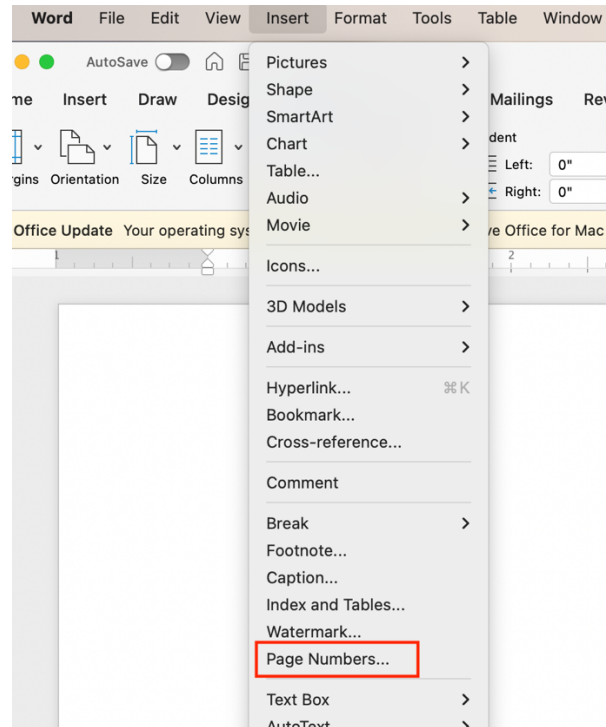
WHY? There are many historical reasons why double spaces have been used, and in recent years, this was common practice when using a typewriter. While it is not “wrong” to do this, it is no longer standard practice and looks outdated.

- It can immediately “age” your book.
- It adds unnecessary space to your book and can unintentionally make it longer than necessary. Longer books cost more to print!

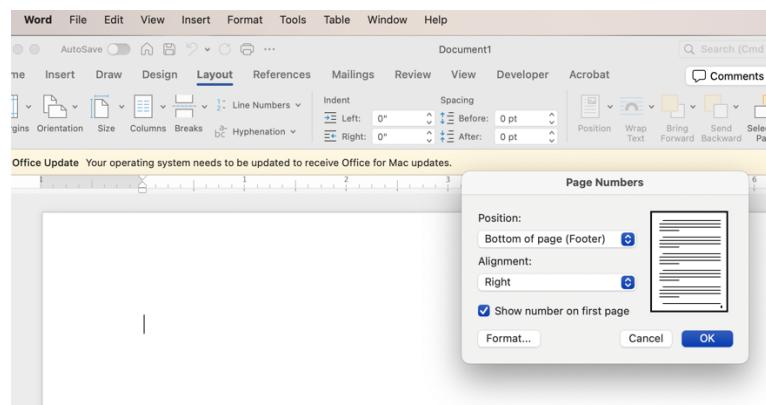
Page numbers

Page numbers make content easy to find, and when you eventually create a table of contents, the page numbers in the table of contents will align with what you see on each page.

- 1. Click on “Insert” in the uppermost toolbar.**
- 2. Scroll down and click on “Page Numbers” (red box).**



3. In the Page Number box, choose where you want to place the numbers on the page.



4. Click OK and you should see the page numbers in your document.

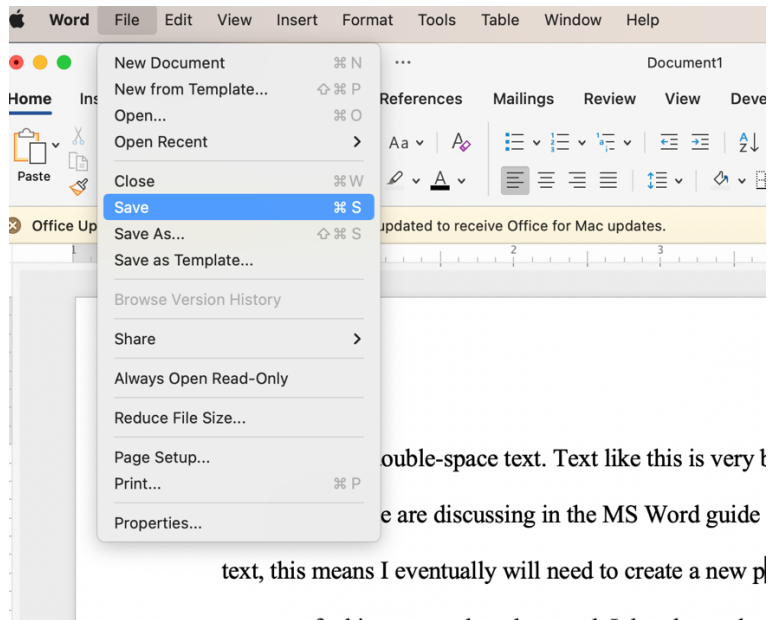
Saving Your Work

There is nothing more heartbreaking than opening your file and realizing half your book is gone. There are multiple ways to ensure your work is safe. MS Word will often ask you to save before you close a document, but the best way to ensure your work is safe is to **save often!**

You should save your document **at least** every 250 words you write, but you can save more often if you like. This will ensure you don't lose any important content.

This is a function in the “File” drop-down menu, and it is similar to when you originally named your document. After a while, it will become second nature to save often; you’re building a habit!

1. Click on “File” in uppermost toolbar.
2. Scroll down and click “Save.”



You’ll be able to see if your file is saved by looking at the red circle in the upper left of the document. A red circle with a black dot means there is unsaved text (since the previous save). A full red dot means that all content is saved.

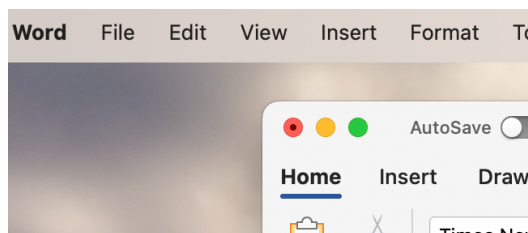


Image: Red circle with black dot, showing unsaved work.

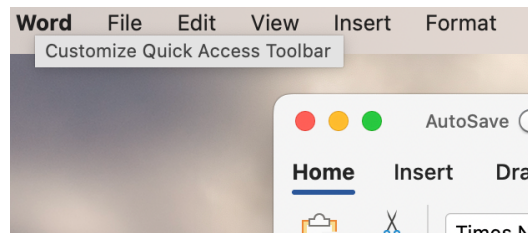


Image: Full red circle, showing all work is saved.

Conclusion

Hopefully this has covered some of the basics to help you get started on your writing journey! Once you feel comfortable with these first steps, there are additional guides to help with any questions you may have.

Additional Guides

- Specialized formatting and style (inserting images, tables and charts, etc.)
- More saving options/file organization
- Special page types (table of contents, title page, etc.)
- Best practices
- Troubleshooting
- The publishing process
- And more!

Reflection

Challenges:

- I replaced most of the bullet points with more subheader sections. I feel like this added more visual clarity, especially with all the lists that I added alongside the images.
- Adding the images took a good chunk of time. I wanted to make sure they helped clarify the text, and didn't add too much clutter. I tried to keep the associated steps as brief as possible, and I centered the images because that felt easier on the eyes.

Lessons Learned:

- I know that once I start writing, I get into a groove, but it's always hard for me to build up the motivation to start. Even though it took me time, I'm glad I finished and created a pretty decent product.
- I started to join online writing groups in order to keep myself on track with coursework, which helped keep me accountable.

Skill/Personal Growth:

- I'm one of those who likes doing lots of projects at all times, and this reminded me that sometimes I need to take a step back because there isn't always time for everything I want to do. Some of my assignment delay was because of lack of motivation, but much of it was also because I took on too much and literally didn't have time. A great eye opener as I move forward in my career, especially now that I'm looking at a possible career change.