

# Text Essentials

Mike Dickison • Learning Skills Centre, University of Canterbury

mike.dickison[at]canterbury.ac.nz • +64 3 364 2987 ext 4138 • www.learningskills.canterbury.ac.nz

## Typography

Type **never** a er a full stop. Double spaces are for typewriters, with their extra-wide letters. With proportional computer fonts, double spaces look tacky. Every professional book, journal, and magazine on your shelf uses one space, and so should you.

The quote marks on your keyboard are not — they're called straight quotes, or typewriter quotes. Typographers' or "curly" quotes are what the real world uses; an apostrophe is a *single closing* curly quote. Your word processor probably converts straight quotes to real quotes on the fly (check the Autocorrect > Autoformat settings) but sometimes it messes up, so learn to type them by hand.

Don't **use** anything (particularly not in these web-link days, and even though some old style books say you should). Use italics instead: ALL CAPS and underlining are both typewriter relics.

The key beside the zero on your keyboard is a hyphen, not a dash. To make a **dash** on a typewriter, you would type two hyphens (and Word will even convert them if you do), but see Insert Symbol to learn the shortcut for an en dash and an em dash. **En** dashes are used in a range (from x to y, replacing the 'to'), while longer **em** dashes show a break in a sentence—like this (or you can use an en dash with a space either side – like this.)

There are a multitude of **special characters** available in all fonts: curly quotes of course, a degrees symbol (°), an ellipsis (...), a bullet (•), some math symbols (×, ±, ÷), Spanish punctuation (¡, ¿), and accented characters (é, à, î, ñ, ö, š, and most importantly the macron: ¯). Don't try and fake these yourself; for example, by making a degrees sign out of a small superscripted 'o'.

## Text Alignment

If you **find** yourself typing tab-tab-tab-tab, something's wrong. You're probably using the default **tab stop**, which are only half an inch apart. Set your own: click the tab stop button, click in the ruler. Choose **left** tabs except in special cases (e.g., when setting columns of numbers, use a decimal tab stop). **The** goal is a single tab between each item in a table—this will make editors much happier, as they won't have to delete hundreds of superfluous tabs. And *never* use the space bar to make things line up; this only works on typewriters.

**Indents** are also controlled from the ruler. You don't need to indent the **first** line of your *very first* paragraph; we can see where it starts. All other paragraphs can have a small indent: a few letters, about a quarter inch. Don't use the tab key; drag the **first-line** indent marker in the ruler (like tabs, these ruler settings only affect the paragraph you're in, or

## Paragraph Spacing

Line spacing is one of the best ways to improve readability, often better than making the text bigger. Check Format > Paragraph. The default is “single spaced”: try setting an *exact* line spacing about 120%

