

Making Your Writing Life Easier with Microsoft Word Style Tags

A Brief Tutorial



This document provides an introduction to style sheets and style tags for Microsoft Word and is intended as a guide for getting started rather than a step-by-step instruction manual. Screen shots are from Microsoft Word 2010, so things may look slightly different for you, depending on what version of Word you're using. These capabilities have been in the software at least since Word 97, so its just a matter of applying them within your documents.

Style sheets are especially helpful to make your writing efficient and to ensure a consistent look and feel throughout the document. Using styles gives your work a polish that will be appreciated by potential agents and/or editors, who do assess how clean a manuscript is when they are evaluating whether or not they want to take it on. A manuscript that doesn't rely on tab characters and hard-coded carriage-returns for spacing and that has the look-and-feel of a work ready for publication conveys the image of a professional writer who is serious about their craft.

Style tags live with the document, so if you create a brand new document, you'll need to set up its style sheet according to the purpose for which you're creating it.

Happy writing!



What's a style sheet?

- A collection of tags for paragraphs within a document
- Each tag defines paragraph attributes
 - Font
 - Font size
 - Font color
 - Font emphasis (bold, italic, etc.)
 - Horizontal alignment
 - Indentation
 - Vertical spacing
 - Page breaks
 - What style paragraph follows this one
 - Default bullet/numbering/lettering
 - Tabs
 - Decoration
 - And much more
- Use style tags instead of
 - Hard-coded spaces for horizontal alignment
 - Multiple carriage returns for vertical spacing
 - Tabs for paragraph indentation
 - Manual insertion of page breaks
 - Manually setting all those attributes repeatedly as you add more text
- Use manual changes for
 - Selected bits of text within a paragraph



Getting started with style tags

- MS Word has some tags pre-configured and built in
- Tags are found on the Home ribbon in the box labeled “Styles”

The screenshot shows the Microsoft Word interface. The title bar reads "MyFather-MyKing_27Sep2018_Manuscript-Layout - Microsoft Word (Product Activation Failed)". The Home ribbon is active, and the Styles group is highlighted with a red box. The Styles group contains three style tags: "AABBC" (Book-Title), "AaBbCcI" (Break), and "AABBC" (Chapter). A red arrow points from the text "Tags are found on the Home ribbon in the box labeled 'Styles'" to this box. The document text is as follows:

Pamela Taylor My Father, My King 6

have to repeat it out there for the sake of protocol. There are things I wish to say that those out there aren't yet ready to hear, but I must have your pledge before I say them. Bishop . . . Brother Infirmer . . . I trust you to keep what's done and said here in complete confidence."

And so, in an unprecedented act, I cross to my uncle and make my pledge. As he raises me up in acceptance, he invites us all to sit with him around the fireplace.

"Edward . . . Rupert . . . it's only the timing of my birth that places the crown on my head and not on one of yours. I'm neither more special nor more able than either of you . . . just older. And though I'm not sure our father was ever fully convinced I had learned the lessons he tried to teach, he really did succeed in helping me see there are things at which you may be more adept than I."

His comment takes me back to an evening almost four years ago. It was the night before Ranulf's raid on the reservoir project. We were sharing a bottle of wine in my quarters, my usual companions being away on various assignments. Harold was in a reflective mood, revealing some of his most intimate thoughts, and I remember noting at the time just how much self-awareness he seemed to possess.

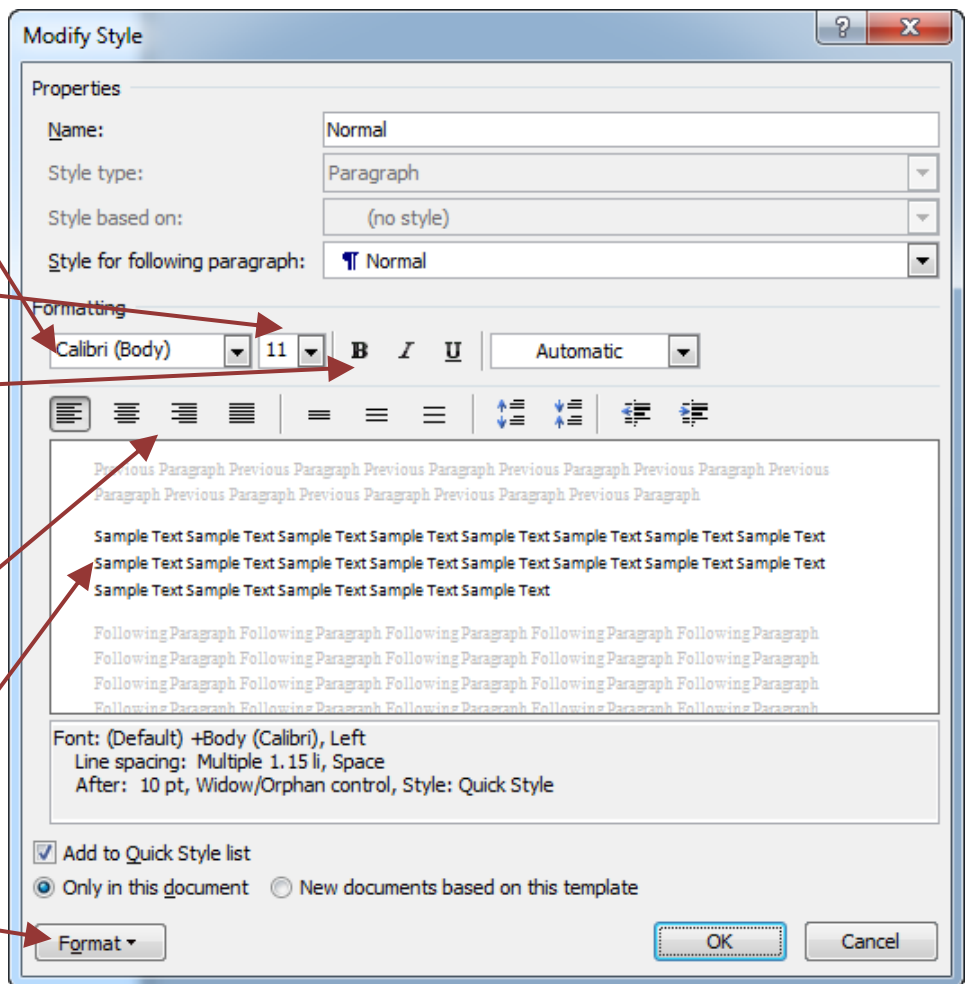
"Alfred," he continues, "I want you to take your place alongside Edward and Rupert to help me chart a course for the kingdom." He looks toward the departed king in his bed. "That man spent your lifetime preparing you for such a role, and he gave me ample opportunity to see that you're ready."

Page: 7 of 258 Words: 70,937 English (U.S.) 100%



Understanding style tags

- The default tag for all paragraphs in a document is “Normal”
 - If you don’t explicitly assign a different tag, the paragraph will have the attributes associated with the “Normal” tag
- So what’s “Normal”?
 - MS Word sets some defaults, but it’s important to adjust these to what you want “Normal” to be for your document
 - Here’s what the defaults are in my version of MS Word



Calibri font

11 point size

No emphasis (none of these are highlighted)

You can see some of the other attributes, but they’re easier to work with in the detail dialog

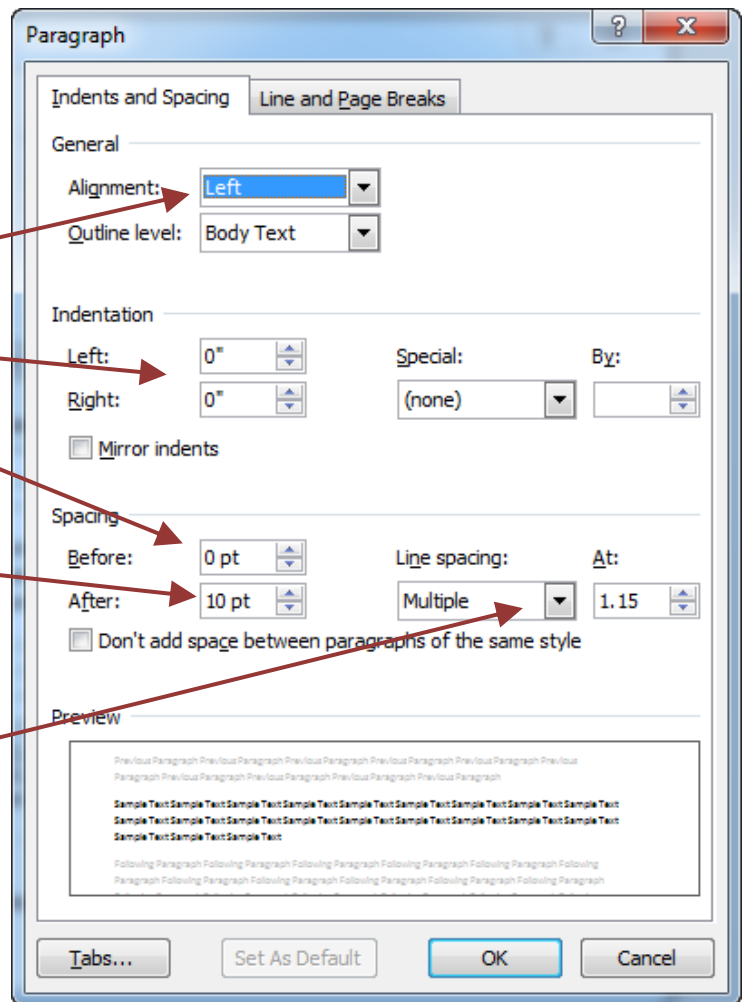
Approximately what your paragraph will look like on the page

Menu to get to the detail dialogs (click on the down-arrow)



Understanding tag attributes

- This is the “Paragraph” detail dialog for the default “Normal” settings in my version of MS Word



Left aligned text

No automatic indentation

No vertical spacing before the paragraph

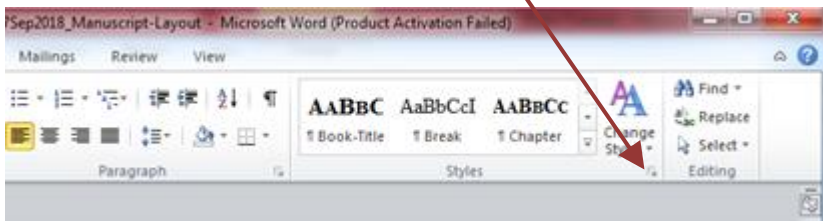
Automatic vertical spacing following the paragraph

Strange line spacing within the paragraph

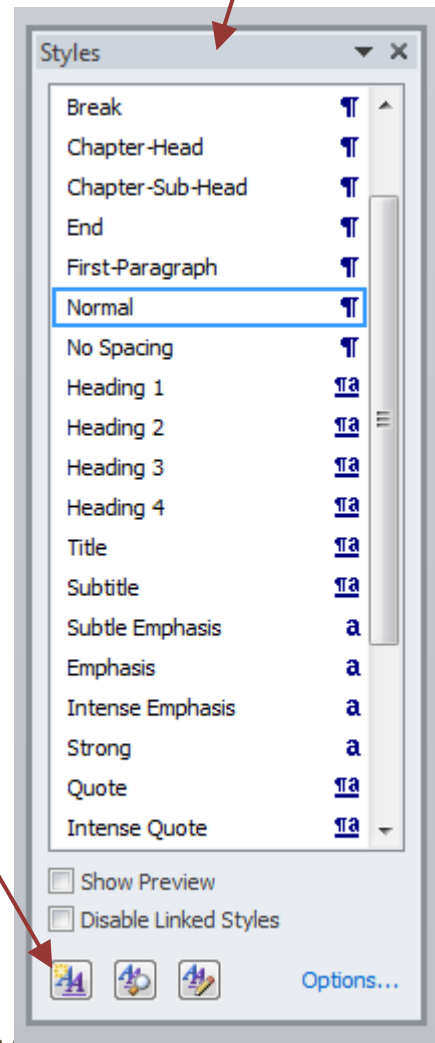


Creating a new tag

- Click on the down-arrow of the Styles box and the Style List dialog will open



- Click on “New Style” and the style attributes dialog will open





Setting up “Normal” attributes for manuscript format

- So to get started in a manuscript for a work to be submitted to an agent, editor, or publisher, the first thing you need to do is to set the attributes of the “Normal” tag to
 - Times New Roman font, 12 point size
 - Automatic indentation of the first line of the paragraph
 - Double-spacing within and between paragraphs
 - Left aligned
 - No emphasis or decoration

The image shows two overlapping dialog boxes from Microsoft Word. The 'Modify Style' dialog box is on the left, and the 'Paragraph' dialog box is on the right. Red arrows point from the list items to specific settings in the dialog boxes.

Modify Style Dialog:

- Name: Normal
- Style type: Paragraph
- Style based on: (no style)
- Style for following paragraph: Normal
- Formatting: Times New Roman, 12, Bold, Italic, Underline, Automatic
- Font: (Default) Times New Roman, 12 pt, Indent: First line: 0.3", Left, Line spacing: Double, Space, Before: 6 pt, Widow/Orphan control, Style: Quick Style
- Options: Add to Quick Style list, Only in this document, New documents based on this template

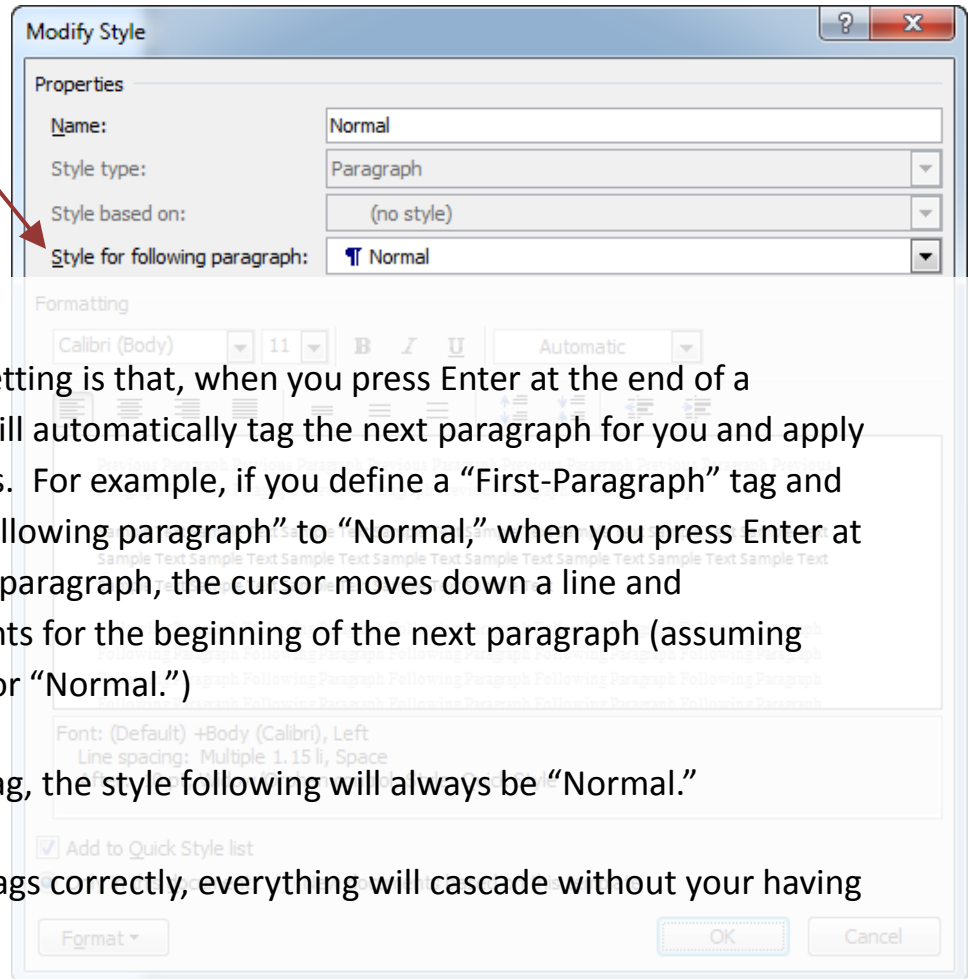
Paragraph Dialog:

- Alignment: Left
- Outline level: Body Text
- Indentation: Left: 0", Right: 0", Special: First line, By: 0.3"
- Spacing: Before: 6 pt, After: 0 pt, Line spacing: Double
- Preview: Shows a sample paragraph with the specified formatting.



Two key attributes that will save you lots of grief

- Style for the following paragraph



The effect of this setting is that, when you press Enter at the end of a paragraph, Word will automatically tag the next paragraph for you and apply that tag's attributes. For example, if you define a "First-Paragraph" tag and set the "Style for following paragraph" to "Normal," when you press Enter at the end of the first paragraph, the cursor moves down a line and automatically indents for the beginning of the next paragraph (assuming indentation is set for "Normal.")

For the "Normal" tag, the style following will always be "Normal."

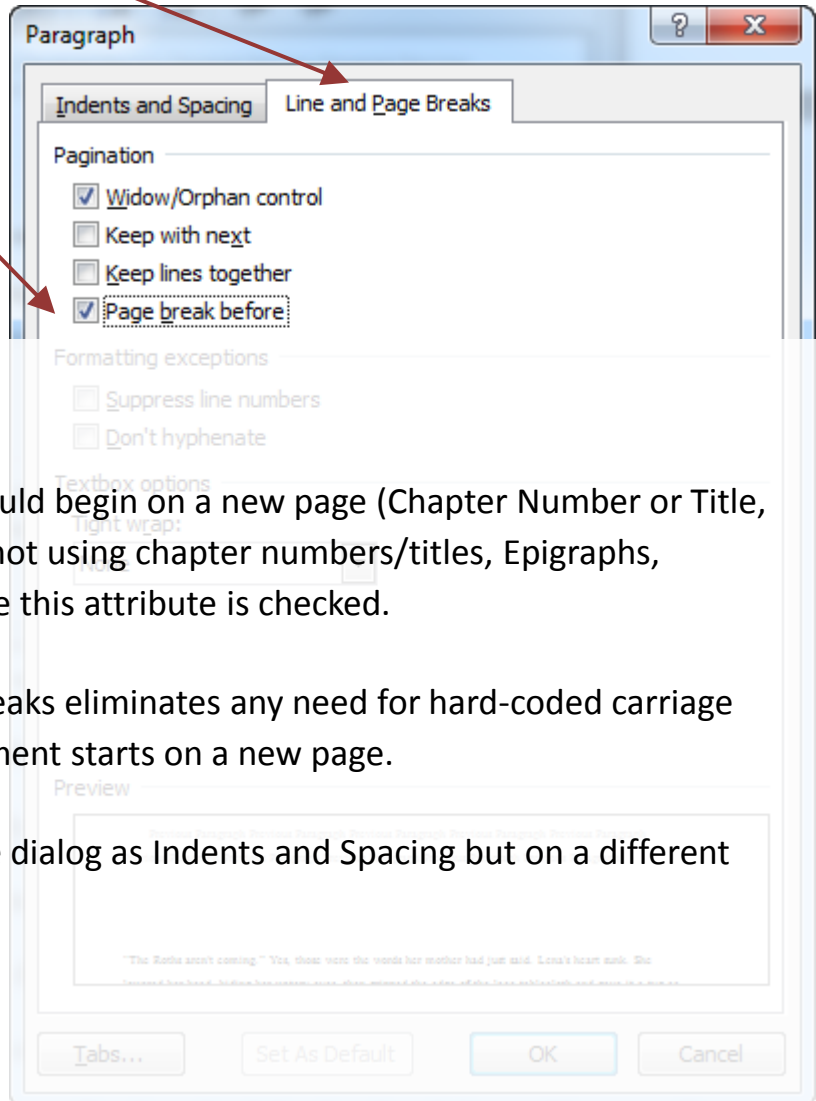
If you set up your tags correctly, everything will cascade without your having to do any work.

Type "Chapter One." Tag that text "Chapter-Number." Press Enter. Your cursor is automatically positioned for you to type the chapter title. When you press Enter again, your cursor is automatically positioned for you to start typing the first paragraph of the chapter. And then when you press Enter at the end of the first paragraph, the cursor goes to the indented position for the next paragraph of your narrative.



Two key attributes that will save you lots of grief

- Page break before



For any element that should begin on a new page (Chapter Number or Title, First Paragraph if you're not using chapter numbers/titles, Epigraphs, Dedications, etc.), be sure this attribute is checked.

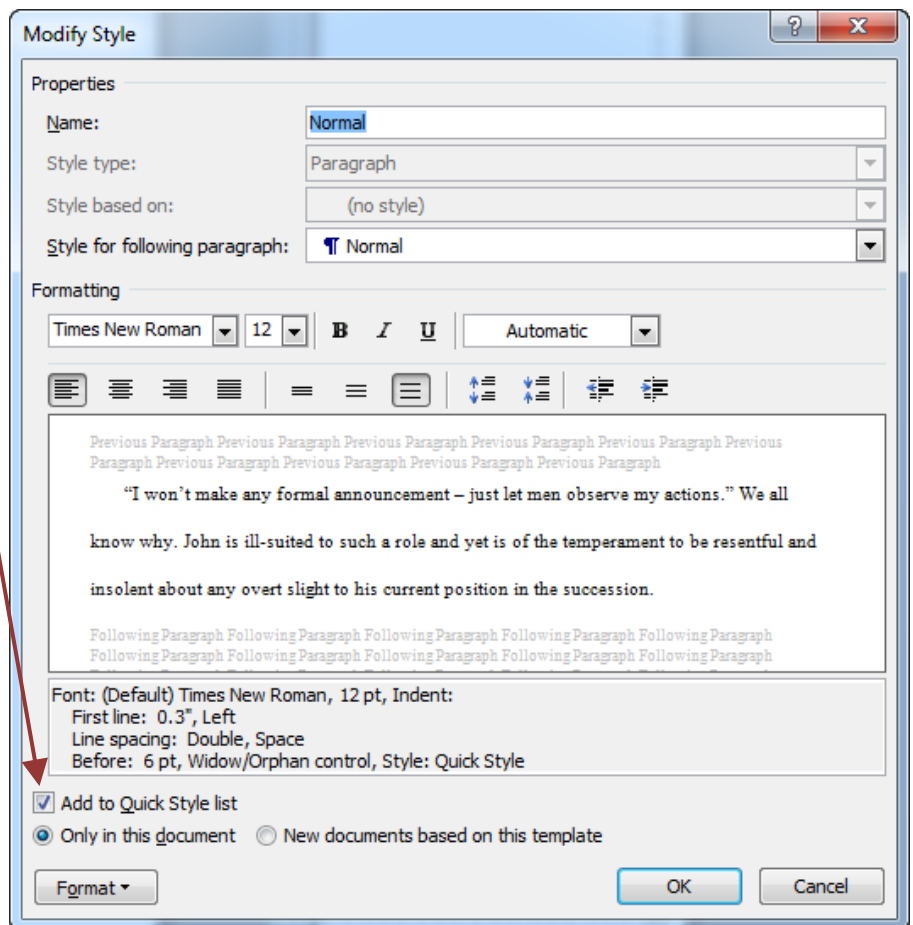
Using automatic page breaks eliminates any need for hard-coded carriage returns to ensure an element starts on a new page.

Note that it's in the same dialog as Indents and Spacing but on a different tab.



And one trick to make your life easier

- Ensure that the tags you create show up in the Styles box on the ribbon
 - Be sure “Add to Quick Style list” is checked





What style tags do I need?

■ Required

- Normal, of course
 - This will be used for most of your text
- Book title, for your title page
 - Perhaps a subtitle tag if your work has a subtitle or tag line
- Author
- Chapter number, if you use chapter numbers
- Chapter title, if you use chapter titles
- First Paragraph
 - For the first paragraph of each chapter

■ Optional

- One or more of these tags, depending on what kinds of things are in your book
- Break
 - To properly align scene-break indicators within a chapter
- Block-quote
 - If you use block-quotes from other sources (books, song lyrics, poems, etc.)
- Custom tags based on the content of your narrative
 - Do your characters write letters to each other that appear in the work? Choose a font and other attributes to set the text of the letters apart from the rest of the text
 - Does your work include descriptions of signs or other graphical images for which you're not actually going to include a drawing or picture? Choose a font and other attributes to make it clear what this is
 - Individual works may have their own unique style tag requirements



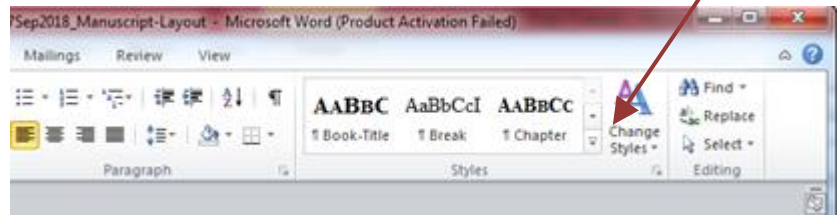
What attributes should I use for my tags?

- The “Style Tag Definitions” spreadsheet that accompanies this tutorial provides recommendations for a number of styles that might be useful in your manuscript
 - There’s also a sample Word document that has some tags defined and could be used as the base document for creating your manuscript
- You may choose to make adjustments that are best suited to your particular project, but stick with the following guiding principles:
 - Always use the vertical spacing attribute (never hard-coded carriage returns) to control white space between the elements of text
 - Always use a horizontal spacing attribute (never tabs) to control paragraph indentation
 - Don’t mix spacing above and below a style, as this will create unexpected results when two different styles come one after the other
 - My recommendation is to only use “space above” as that is really what matters at the end of the day
 - For manuscripts that are to be submitted to agents or editors:
 - Use Times New Roman font, 12-point, double-spaced for the body text of your work
 - Ensure each chapter begins on a new page (page break before the Chapter Number or Chapter Title or before the First Paragraph if you don’t use chapter numbers or titles)
 - Do not indent the first paragraph of a chapter



So how do I apply style tags?

- It's simple: place your cursor anywhere in the paragraph and click on the tag name from the quick-list in the "Styles" box
 - Important note: If you highlight text within the paragraph, the attributes will be applied only to the highlighted text
 - So just click anywhere within the paragraph, click on the tag, and the attributes are applied to the entire paragraph
- Style tags appear in alphabetical order in the quick-list
 - If you don't see the tag you're looking for, you may need to scroll to get the full list



- Already have a big document and you've changed the attributes of the "Normal" style?
 - Sometimes, the new attributes will be applied automatically, but this is an area where Word sometimes gets confused
 - Select all the "Normal" paragraphs that aren't reformatting as you expect and press Ctrl-Q. Presto-change-o, all your revised attributes are applied. (Yes, you could also select the paragraphs and click on "Normal" in the "Styles" box.)