

Paragraphs do not occur in nature. Whereas sentences are grammatical units intrinsic to the spoken language, paragraphs are a literary convention designed to divide masses of content into appetizing portions.

Indents have been common since the seventeenth century. Adding space between paragraphs (paragraph spacing) is another standard device. On the web, a paragraph is a semantic unit (the `<p>` tag in html) that is typically displayed on screen with space inserted after it.

A typical indent is an em space, or a quad, a fixed unit of space roughly the width of the letter's cap height. An em is thus proportional to the size of the type; if you change the point size or column width, the indents will remain appropriately scaled. Alternatively, you can use the tab key to create an indent of any depth.

A designer might use this technique in order to align the indents with a vertical grid line or other page element. Avoid indenting the very first line of a body of text. An indent signals a break or separation; there is no need to make a break when the text has just begun. Despite the ubiquity of indents and paragraph spacing, designers have developed numerous alternatives that allow them to shape content in distinctive ways.

Different kinds of content invite different approaches to marking paragraphs. In early printed books, paragraphs were indicated with a symbol, such as ¶, with no additional space or line break. In the seventeenth century, it became standard to indent the first line of a paragraph and break the line at the end. Commercial printing tends to embrace fragmentation over wholeness, allowing readers to sample bits and pieces of text. Modern literary forms such as the interview invite designers to construct inventive typographic systems.

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