



## ESL Podcast 608 – Formatting Text

### GLOSSARY

**formatting** – the way words are displayed in printed or electronic documents; the visible style of written words

\* The magazine's formatting requirements for article submissions include double-spaced text and 1.2" margins.

**standard** – basic; normal; ordinary; expected

\* Did you buy a standard telephone, or one with a lot of extra features?

**text** – written words; what one has written

\* There is about 2,000 words of text on each page of this newsletter.

**border** – lines or artwork around text or other images, usually in a rectangular shape

\* Let's put a dotted-line border around each coupon so people know where they should cut it out of the newspaper.

**shading** – a gray area behind text or objects, used for emphasis and visual interest

\* Our poster would attract more attention if we put shading around the title.

**to center** – to put text in the center of each horizontal line; to put text in the middle of each line, not starting at the left edge or ending at the right edge

\* Our teacher wants us to center only the report title and headings.

**flush** – immediately next to something else; adjacent to

\* If you're listing dollar amounts, print them flush right so that the decimal points are lined up.

**readability** – the ease of reading something; the characteristic that makes it quick and easy for people to read something without much effort

\* Some people think using big words makes their writing more professional, but really it just reduces readability.

**presentation** – the way something is shared with or shown to other people

\* They bought a simple gift, but it had a beautiful presentation, wrapped in a large box covered with beautiful wrapping paper and many ribbons and bows.

**caps** – uppercase or capital (ABC) letters, not lowercase (abc) letters

\* If you write an email in caps, people think you're shouting at them.



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**to underline** – to draw a thin, horizontal line underneath a word, phrase, or sentence, usually for emphasis

\* As Claire studied, she underlined the main ideas in her textbook.

**bullet** – a small mark, usually a round circle, used at the beginning of each item in a list, especially in a report

\* Each sample sentence in the glossaries for ESL Podcast Learning Guides begins with a bullet.

**bold** – with letters that are thicker and darker than usual, used for emphasis

\* Words in bold in the ESL Podcast scripts are defined in the Learning Guides.

**italics** – with letters printed at an angle, more like handwriting, used for emphasis

\* Most style guides recommend using italics for the names of songs and books.

**intended effect** – the result one wants to achieve; what one plans to do or hopes to have happen as the result of one's actions

\* They thought praising her daughter would encourage her to do well in school, but it didn't have the intended effect. Instead, she became overly confident and stopped studying.

**off (one's) rocker** – crazy; no longer thinking clearly or rationally

\* Are you off your rocker? Why did you think you'd be able to fly if you jumped off the roof?

**stodgy** – old-fashioned and very conservative; unwilling or unable to accept new ideas or new ways of doing things

\* Marcus is too stodgy to do anything fun, like snowboarding or skiing. He'd rather just watch other people have fun.

**clip art** – small electronic drawings and other images that are put into electronic documents to make them more interesting or entertaining

\* Jasmina put a lot of clip art in her PowerPoint presentation to try to make it more interesting, but it really just made it look childish.

**to jazz (something) up** – to make something more exciting, more interesting, or fancier

\* They're trying to jazz up their exercise routine by participating in a dance aerobics class twice a week.



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### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the goal of formatting?
    - a) To cut down on readability.
    - b) To go off one's rocker.
    - c) To jazz things up.
  2. Which of these actions changes where text is on the page?
    - a) Shading text.
    - b) Centering text.
    - c) Underlining text.
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### WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

#### **shading**

The word “shading,” in this podcast, means a gray area behind text or objects, used for emphasis and visual interest: “The shading on this brochure is too dark, and it makes it very hard to read the text.” Or, “I’m amazed by how that artist uses shading to add depth to his drawings.” As a verb, “to shade” means to protect something from light, or to prevent light from falling directly onto something: “Cris shaded his eyes with his hand as he looked toward the mountains.” Or, “Those huge trees shade the house, keeping it cooler in the summer.” As a noun, a “shade” is a tone or color: “Which shade of lipstick do you like better: bright red or soft red?”

#### **bullet**

In this podcast, the word “bullet” means a small mark, usually a round circle, used at the beginning of each item in a list, especially in a report: “Instead of listing all those things in a paragraph separated by commas, try putting them in a list with bullets to make it easier for people to read.” When talking about guns, a “bullet” is a small piece of metal that is shot from a gun to hurt or kill a person or animal: “The hunter shot three bullets, but he didn’t hit any of the geese.” Finally, the phrase “to bite the bullet” means to do something that is dangerous, difficult, or unpleasant, especially if one has been avoiding it for a period of time: “They’ve been delaying cleaning out the garage for years, but now it’s time to bite the bullet and just do it.”



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### CULTURE NOTE

Most “word processing programs” (software programs that allow users to create and format documents, like Microsoft Word and WordPerfect) have “dozens” (groups of 12) or even hundreds of “fonts” (styles of letters) “installed” (included in a computer program). These fonts can be divided into three categories: “serif fonts,” “sans serif fonts,” and “other fonts.”

“Serif fonts” are fonts that have short lines at the ends of most of the “strokes” (one movement of a pen when writing) used to write letters. Common serif fonts include Times New Roman, Garamond, and Bookman Old Style. “Sans serif fonts” are fonts that are made from simpler lines and do not have short lines at the ends of strokes. Common sans serif fonts include Arial, Calibri, and Tahoma. “Other fonts” include graphic-based fonts, like Webdings (►❏Ⓢ♥❋❏?) and Wingdings (♠✠❏♣♠❏♣♠), and fonts that are very artistic, like

**BURNSTOWN DAM** and **PLANET BENSON 2**.

In general, serif fonts have greater readability than sans serif fonts. Studies of “reading speeds” (how quickly people are able to read text) show that most people are able to “scan” (quickly read the most important parts of) text written in serif fonts more quickly than text written in sans serif fonts.

Different fonts are used for different purposes. Times New Roman and Arial are probably the two most common fonts in the United States. Both of them are “appropriate” (acceptable) for reports, resumes, and letters, although Times New Roman is probably the better choice for more formal, longer documents. ESL Podcast Learning Guides use Arial. Websites tend to use Arial or Verdana.

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Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – c; 2 – b



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### COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 608: Formatting Text.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 608. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Our website is eslpod.com. Go there today to become a member of ESL Podcast and support our efforts. You can make a donation or become a member and receive our Learning Guides, which are 8- to 10-page PDF guides we produce for each of our current episodes, including this one.

This episode is called "Formatting Text." It's a dialogue between Chad and Pamela that is going to be using a lot of vocabulary that you might need when talking about preparing a formal document on a word processing program such as Microsoft Word. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Chad: Okay, this report is finally finished.

Pamela: Oh, not quite. I'm still working on the formatting.

Chad: We used the standard formatting for this type of report. I don't think we should play around with the text.

Pamela: Standard is boring. I want our report to be special. I'm putting a nice border on the cover, adding some shading, and centering some of the text.

Chad: No, I really think that's a bad idea. All of the text should be flush left, and nobody else puts shading in their reports. It cuts down on readability.

Pamela: Readability is secondary to presentation. Look, I'm just putting some of the titles in caps and underlining them, adding some bullets, and putting some of the important sections in bold or italics. This will all make each page look more professional.

Chad: I don't think it's going to have your intended effect.



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Pamela: Really?

Chad: Yes, instead of thinking we're being professional, they'll think we've gone off our rocker.

Pamela: Don't be so stodgy. Hey, I think adding some clip art would really jazz things up, don't you?

Chad: Oh, God!

[end of dialogue]

Chad begins our dialogue by saying to Pamela, "Okay, this report is finished." A "report" is a document that summarizes some information about a particular topic, often as a result of research on that topic. Pamela says, "Oh, not quite (meaning no, it isn't finished yet – not quite). I'm still working on the formatting." The "formatting" is the ways that words are printed or displayed in electronic documents; it's the visible style of the words, how they appear on the page. Chad says, "We used the standard formatting for this type of report." "Standard" in many business uses typically means the basic, ordinary, normal, expected type of whatever it is you're talking about. So, the "standard formatting" would be the formatting that their company always uses for these kinds of reports. Chad says, "I don't think we should play around with the text." "To play around" is a phrasal verb which here means to change without really needing to change. "Play around" can often just mean to look at something closely to try different options. In this case, it's used somewhat as a negative to mean that it's a waste of time. The "text" are the written words, what you have actually written.

Pamela says, "Standard is boring." Standard formatting, she means, is boring; it's not interesting. She says, "I want our report to be special (to be different). I'm putting a nice border on the cover, adding some shading, and centering some of the text." A "border" is a line or some sort of artistic design that goes around text or other images, usually it is rectangular in shape. It's like a big box that goes around everything else, often a black line. "Shading" is gray area behind the text – behind the writing or behind objects. It's often used for emphasis. You might make a certain sentence gray, meaning that the background is gray but the actual type – the actual text is still in black in order to emphasize a particular sentence. Usually in black and white documents shading is what we call the color between black and white, which is gray. "Shading" has a couple of other meanings however, and those can be found only in our Learning Guide. "To center" (center) means to put the text on the page so that each sentence is in the



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middle of the page or the middle of the area. When you center your text there isn't a line – a vertical line at the left or right sides of the paragraph. The paragraph is oddly shaped; each side, both the left and the right side are going to be slightly different because the sentences are in the middle of the page. Sometimes we use this for poetry or perhaps for special invitations. That's to center.

Well, Pamela wants to put a nice border on the cover, add some shading, and center some of the text. Chad says, "No, I think that's a bad idea," and Pamela says, "Chad, I think you're ugly!" No, she doesn't say that! Chad continues, "All of the text should be flush left, and nobody else puts shading in the reports." To be "flush left" means to be immediately next to the left hand side of the page. Basically it means that all of the sentences begin on the same vertical line on the left side of the page. To be "flush right" means that all of the sentences are on a vertical line on the right side of the page. Finally, the third possibility, other than centering, is to be justified. Text that is "justified" (justified) is text that has two lines, one on the left, one on the right, and all of the sentences reach those two lines. So, there are two straight lines of text on the left and the right if you look at the page. Most books are written either flush left or justified; you don't often see a long document flush right or centered.

Chad thinks all the text should be flush left, and says that to put shading in the report cuts down on readability. "To cut down on (something)" is a phrasal verb meaning it reduces, it lessens, it makes it less. In this case, it makes it less readable because it cuts down on readability. "Readability" is how easy it is to read something, both because of the words – the grammar, the vocabulary – as well as the way they appear on the page. You want things to be very readable in terms of the appearance of the text.

Pamela says, "Readability is secondary to presentation." "Secondary" means it is not as important as, or is second most important, but the most important is presentation. "Presentation" is the way that you show something or share something with other people. "Presentation" is often also used to mean a speech or a talk in front of a group of people. Here, however, it mean simply the way that something looks when you give it to someone else.

Pamela says, "Look (meaning I want you to listen to me), I'm just putting some of the titles in caps and underlining them, adding some bullets, and putting some of the important sections in bold or italics." Several formatting terms there, let's start with "caps" (caps). "Caps" refers to – or is short for capital letters. We sometimes call these upper-case letters; they are the large form of the letter.





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You also have lower-case letters; these are smaller forms of the letters. So in English, sentences always begin with a capital letter. The first letter, in other words, is in caps – that is, a capital letter. To put an entire word in caps would mean to capitalize the entire word, all of the letters are upper case. “To underline” means to put a usually black horizontal line underneath, or below a sentence. A “bullet” (bullet) in formatting is a small mark, often a round circle that is used at the beginning of each item in a list. You often will see what are called “bullet points.” Bullet points are the same as bullets; they are usually small white or black circles that go in front of a list of things – each item, each thing on that list. “Bullet” has other meanings in English as well, and those can be found in the Learning Guide. If you don’t know them, you might want to learn them because it could save your life! “Bold” (bold) are letters that are thicker and darker than the other letters around them, usually we use this to emphasize a particular word, to make it, we would say, “stand out,” to make it noticeable. Finally, Pamela talks about italics. “Italics” is when the letters are printed at an angle so that it looks more like handwriting. Again, this is used for emphasis.

So Pamela says that she’s going to put some of the titles in caps and underline them, she’s going to add some bullets or some bullet points, and she’s going to put some of the important sections in bold or italics. “This will all make each page more professional,” she says. Chad says, “I don’t think it’s going to have your intended effect.” The “intended effect” is the result that you want to achieve; is what you plan to do or hope to have happen as a result of your actions. If you walk up to a beautiful woman in a bar and you say to her, “Do you come here often?” the intended effect is for her to start a conversation with you. However, the more probable effect is for her to ignore you or turn the other way. Well, at least that’s what always used to happen to me!

Chad doesn’t think Pamela’s changes are good ones. Pamela says, “Really?” Chad replies, “Yes, instead of thinking we’re being professional, they’ll think we’ve gone off our rocker.” The expression “to go off your rocker” (rocker), or “to be off your rocker” means to be crazy, to not be able to think clearly or rationally, to be nuts. A “rocker” is a word for a “rocking chair,” which is a chair that has instead of regular legs two semi-circles, almost like parts of a circle, that you can move the chair back and forth easily. This is sometimes a kind of chair we associate in the United States with old people – with elderly people, who it is sometimes thought don’t always think rationally because they’re old and their brains are old. This is certainly true of my old brain! Well, that’s the association then, the rocker is an old person who may be a little crazy. I suppose “to be off your rocker” means that you are up and out of your rocking chair and causing problems somewhere else.





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In any case, Pamela says to Chad, “Don’t be so stodgy (stodgy).” “To be stodgy” means to be very old-fashioned, to think the way people thought 50 years ago or 100 years ago. It can also mean to be unwilling or unable to accept new ideas, new ways of doing things. Pamela says, “Hey, I think adding some clip art would really jazz things up, don’t you?” “Clip (clip) art” (two words) refers to small electronic drawings or other images that you can put in electronic documents, like Microsoft Word or PowerPoint, that some people think will make the presentation, the way it looks, more interesting. When personal computers first started to become popular in the 80s and 90s it was very common to see people putting clip art in all sorts of things, including on web pages. I think that has become less popular, thankfully, now.

Pamela wants to put some clip art in order to jazz things up. “To jazz (something) up” means to make it more exciting, to make it more interesting. Pamela says, “I think adding some clip art would really jazz things up, don’t you?” Chad doesn’t agree, he simply says, “Oh, God!” meaning he doesn’t agree at all.

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]

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Chad: Oh, God!

[end of dialogue]

I apologize for our episode going a little long today. Who knew formatting text could be so fascinating?! Well, Lucy Tse – Dr. Lucy Tse to you – knows, and we thank her for her efforts.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on ESL Podcast.

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