

The Mac Is Not a Typewriter. Your PC Isn't Either.

It astounds me sometimes, the amount of push-back I get when I tell authors, “*You know, we don't double-space after periods anymore.*” They absolutely cannot believe it.

Dear hearts, it is true. It has been true for at least twenty years, when I flunked a typing test taken on a computer at the local university because I'd double-spaced after every period. I know this is going to come as a shock to many of you.*

There are two reasons for this news flash, and they work in tandem.

You see, the human brain processes letters and characters and turns them into words and sentences based on *shape*. You don't read each individual letter; instead, you see the shape of a word like *the* and your brain knows what it is long before you process the individual letters. (This is why, by the way, SOMETHING SET IN ALL CAPS IS SO DIFFICULT TO READ. NO SHAPE.)

That's the first reason. Here's the second.

Some of you reading this may actually remember typewriters. :) The typewriter was what they called a monospaced instrument: each letter took up the same amount of space. No matter whether it was an **m** or an **i** ... or a period. Every character was assigned the same amount of space. (Even a space was allotted the same amount.)

This created a loosely spaced document. (If you've seen a typeface default to Courier, you know what this looks like.) Output from a typewriter wasn't as pretty as professional letterpress typesetting but it sure was convenient. However, words typed on a typewriter were *so* loosely spaced that the brain had trouble processing the end of one sentence and the beginning of the next. Thus arose the convention of tapping the space bar twice after a period. Now the eye could easily see the end of a sentence.

Enter the computer. Enter the *desktop* computer. This is *not* a monospaced instrument. It can “think.” (Oh, just work with me here, please.) It allows a little more space for an **m** and less for an **i**. Furthermore, the space that follows a **period** is slightly larger than the space that follows a letter. In other words, *the computer distinguishes between* a) the space between words and b) the space that follows the end of a sentence. The latter is larger, and allows your eye to see the end of the sentence.

Because of this, if you double-space after a period, you've inserted *too much* space.

This is apparently a very emotional issue for a lot of people. But trust me: no double-spacing after periods. I don't care what they taught you in your high school typing class. Those times are gone. Stop doing it and Your Editor will be happy. :)

Source: <http://www.jamiechavez.com/blog/>