Word Processing for ICT & Computing Coursework

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Introduction

Most people are used to using a word processor and similar software for creating letters, notes and short essays. In most cases this is perfectly fine and the skills are relatively straightforward and easy. Often it's nice to use slightly extended functionality within essays and letters throwing in columns, images fancy titles and other effects to make a visual difference.

Presentation is marks

Although few specifications actually separate any marks for presentation it often does have an influence on marks. From the point of view of the examiner they may be inclined to award a candidate marks for well written and presented work on the grounds that the work looks like the students has put a lot of effort in. But most importantly Examiners have to be able to see that there is *evidence of work*. What this means is that marks are available for showing some kind of skill or demonstrating a technique. If the examiner is unable to find where in your work you provide evidence for having fulfilled criteria then they are unable to give you marks.

Breaking habits

The first thing that you have to be prepared to do is break some old habits. Many ways of working with smaller documents that you are used to aren't good for working with a larger document. Many of the things covered in this guide will look like and feel to be slower and more complicated. The benefits will only be obvious after time. Be prepared to spend time learning some of the advanced and different features of your chosen word processor, I promise you that if you use the tips and techniques covered here your document will be easier to manage and will look more professional.

Fonts & Styles

Formatting fonts golden rules

I have decided that this comes first and will endeavour to go over my basic rules for formatting, fonts and layout to encourage good habits. As previously pointed out many of these will take more time and effort than seems necessary but the outcome will be worth while. Below are my rules (in no particular order):

- KISS (Less is more)
- Think of your reader
- Aim to look Professional
- Consistency is gold
- Make the document easy to update
- Don't apply formatting until you have done the first 2 – 3 pages
- Keep to as few styles as possible

The term Keep It Simple Stupid is an old engineering term pointing out that often people start off by attempting to "reinvent the wheal" to solve a problem when a far simpler solution is actually available. When it comes to documents the same idea is often applicable. In the same vein as "Less is more" simple formatting using common and consistent styles is easier to read and looks more professional. Think of a newspaper or book. Most of which use a simple selection of formatting with 5 or 6 title styles and 4 content styles for most newspapers.

Look at the layout of this document for example, It is easy to work out which section the subsections are related to due to the layout as well as the content (and titles). This is because I have used consistent styles and formatting thought.

If you use good formatting techniques the document will be easier for you to add further sections to or move sections around. Time spent now on the layout, formatting and styles will be three times as much time saved later when things change (and trust me in a ICT project your report *will* change).

The reason I say don't apply any formatting until you have got 2 to 3 pages of content is because after 2 or 3 pages you will have examples of most of the common different types of content you are going to have and you can then start to see how different things will look together.

Setting styles & formatting

It may be worth your time looking at the headings section below for simply selecting headings but for other things there is a big variety.

First of all start writing your document with line breaks only after a heading and at the end of a paragraph (no extra line breaks) This is because spacing can easily be done with formatting and styles and the result will be much better. Once you have 2 or 3 pages apply first of all headings. Then go on to think about other paragraph styles.

Headings

Something often overlooked is headings for the simple reason people are in the habit of selecting bold and underlined for each of their headings. In smaller documents this is fine but in larger documents this isn't such a good idea and tends to look unprofessional. For example when in newspapers do you see headings or titles underlined?

Remember my less is more rule for formatting and make good use of headings to bring information out rather than bright colours and garish graphics.

The text you want to set as a heading just has to be highlighted and then you select from a dropdown menu at the top (looking like the image to the right). The number of heading you want (ignore if the formatting isn't what you want we will look at this separately) the formatting can be done later. The important thing is to separate sections/chapters with "Heading 1" and subsections with "heading 2" – "heading 4" to indicate how subsections are related to each other and their respective section. This is important for both layout, presentation but also using features of your word processor to track sections and subsections for things like your table of contents.
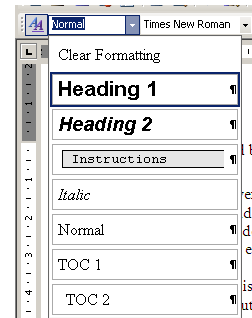
Paragraph Styles

Once you have separated your headings (doesn't your document look clear and professional already?) you can think about tailoring your paragraphs and headings a little more. Bear in mind that in most cases there is little advantage to getting carried away with your style and formatting.

The first thing you may wish to do is:

```
Select from the "style" dropdown menu the option "more"
A collection of options will appear on the right
At the bottom of this collection of options is a box ladled
"show"
Select from this box "formatting in use"
If you want to change the default font used in paragraphs: hover
the mouse over "Normal", a down arrow will appear on the right,
click the arrow and select "Modify".
In the box that appears you can select options for that type of
text any changes you make are immediately applied to your
document when you click "OK". Be sure to have a good hunt around.
```

This method works for all styles. My only warning is that any changes to the "Normal" style other than simple font/size changes can have repercussions on other styles. If this is the case reset the normal style and then make a "new style". Customize the new style and then on the down arrow for "Normal" select "select all" and then select the new style and all the text for your document that isn't already a title or different style will become the new style.

This will take some practise, save your work regularly.

Layout
Page numbers

While being relatively simple this is sometimes overlooked and if not paid careful attention to can end up with negative influence on your work. Essentially page numbers combined with a good table of contents can be the difference between an examiner being able to find evidence of work and not being able to find evidence of work… i.e. you getting marks you deserve and you not getting marks you deserve.

To insert page numbers in the simplest of cases using Microsoft Word (other word processors have similar functionality) all you have to use is:

```
Insert>Page Numbers
```

This gives you a small dialogue (see right) with instructions allowing you to insert page numbers. The defaults (used on this document) are normally fine. In longer documents you may wish to separate sections or use the advanced button to insert section and subsection numbers or information.
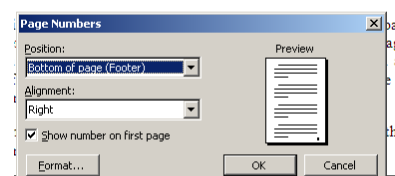
Table of contents

Demonstrated on the first page of this document you can use page numbers to point your reader at the section of the document that they are interested in reading. In the case of ICT and computing projects its usually the section they are marking or are looking for the evidence that you have done the work.

To insert the table of contents follow these instructions:

```
Insert>Reference>Index & Tables
Select "Table of contents" tab at the top
In most cases selecting "OK" with the defaults is sufficient.
```

This will insert a table of contents using your Headings as guides. Before doing this make sure you have your headings sorted out and that you don't have too much cluttered formatting.

Use of a page

It is important to use all of a page in a manor that is both:

- **Not cluttered** clutter is confusing and ugly.
- **Not wasting paper** Often when documenting systems students are tempted to have one large picture on a page with a couple of lings of text, this often looks ugly and unprofessional not to mention is a key waste of paper.

Layout of information

Make use of the word processors features to layout information in a manner that is clear and easy to follow. Good layout often saves you hours of typing make good of the following features in a well placed and organised manor:

- Titles/Sections & subsections
- Bullet points
- Numbered lists

Landscape & portrait

Most documents are written in portrait which is fine for text and most other uses. However some tables, images and other unusual layouts that you may well come across in your work will possibly require to have occasional pages or sections in portrait. This doesn't require starting a new document. All you have to de is remember that a section can be just one page long and follow the below instructions:

```
File>Page setup
Select "landscape"
Select (from the bottom of the box) "this point forward"
And click OK
```

This will require some practise and fiddling with and I'd recommend using the "Show/Hide" button (looks like a backwards "P" on the task bar) to display hidden characters including the important "section break" marker.

Once you have finished the section that you want to be landscape you can return to portrait by following the same procedure selecting "portrait" and "from this point forward" and your document will return in the same manor.