

Creative Indents

INDENTING THE FIRST LINE of every paragraph is a habit most of us acquired in grammar school. However, for those daring souls who have always insisted on coloring outside the lines, it's time to consider using a different style paragraph indent. There are more options than you might have realized!

The purpose of an indent is to create a visual separation between paragraphs. The most commonly used indent is the first line indent. There's no hard-and-fast rule about how much to indent your first lines, but make sure the space is proportionate to the size and column width of your text. Feel free to omit the indent from the first paragraph, since there is no need to separate the beginning of the copy from anything else.

If you have lots of space and lots of copy, try a hanging indent, or outdent. This dramatic technique is actually the opposite of an indent, in that the first line extends out to the left of the paragraph. It's a useful trick to liven up body text, especially when there are few or no graphic elements, such as photographs or illustrations.

For small amounts of copy, you can always try something more decorative: use a dingbat or any simple graphic

Mr. Darling was frightfully ashamed of himself, but he would not give in. In a horrid silence Mrs. Darling smelt the bowl. "O George," she said, "it's your medicine!"

"It was only a joke," he roared, while she comforted her boys, and Wendy hugged Nana. "Much good," he said bitterly, "my wearing myself to the bone trying to be funny in this house."

And still Wendy hugged Nana. "That's right," he shouted. "Coddle her! Nobody coddles me. Oh dear no! I am only the breadwinner, why should I be coddled—why, why, why!"

When making traditional first line indents, set your tabs manually according to what looks good; don't rely on the default tabs of your software to dictate your design. (Excerpt from Peter Pan, by J. M. Barrie.)

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An extreme indent looks best with more copy than can be shown here.

element to separate the paragraphs. Do this in one of two ways: either run the paragraphs into each other with only the dingbat (and added space around it) separating them, or place a dingbat between two paragraphs which are separated by a line space.

When you have room to spare and want a cleaner, more open look, separate the paragraphs with an extra line space instead of an indent. This style is often used in correspondence, and works well in long blocks of text when saving space is not a consideration. ■

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An outdent adds graphic interest to body text.

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A color dingbat can be used to separate paragraphs.