

two spaces after period legal writing

Two spaces after period legal writing has been a long-standing convention in the legal profession, as well as in various other fields of writing. The debate over whether to use one or two spaces after a period has persisted for decades, influenced by changes in technology, style guides, and evolving writing practices. This article will explore the history of this practice, its relevance in legal writing, and the reasons behind the ongoing debate.

Understanding the Historical Context

The use of two spaces after a period originated in the typewriter age. Typewriters, which produced monospaced text, lacked the ability to visually differentiate between sentences effectively. To enhance readability, typists began inserting an extra space after periods to signal the end of a sentence.

The Transition to Digital Writing

With the advent of word processing software and proportional fonts, the need for a double space diminished. Proportional fonts adjust the spacing between characters and sentences based on their size and shape, which naturally improves readability. Yet, the tradition of using two spaces lingered, particularly among those trained in the typewriter era.

The Legal Writing Landscape

In legal writing, clarity and precision are paramount. Legal documents must convey information accurately and be easily understood by judges, lawyers, and clients alike. This emphasis on clarity has led to a preference for certain formatting styles, including the debate over spacing after periods.

Current Trends in Legal Writing

While some legal professionals still advocate for two spaces after a period, many have adopted the single space standard recommended by various modern style guides. Key factors influencing this shift include:

- **Style Guides:** The American Psychological Association (APA), Modern Language Association (MLA), and the Chicago Manual of Style have all transitioned to endorsing a single space after periods.
- **Legal Style Guides:** The Bluebook and ALWD Citation Manual, two prominent legal citation guides, also recommend using a single space, aligning legal writing with broader trends in

academia and publishing.

- **Technology:** Word processors automatically format text in a way that enhances readability, reducing the need for double spacing.

The Argument for Two Spaces

Despite the increasing prevalence of single spacing, some legal writers and typists continue to defend the use of two spaces after periods. Their arguments include:

1. **Readability:** Advocates argue that two spaces create a more noticeable break between sentences, aiding comprehension, especially in dense legal texts.
2. **Tradition:** Many legal professionals were trained to use two spaces, and for them, it feels more natural and familiar.
3. **Consistency:** In certain legal circles, consistency in formatting is crucial. Some practitioners prefer to maintain the traditional method for uniformity across documents.

Understanding the Opposition

Critics of the two-space convention argue against its continued use for several reasons:

1. Modern Standards

As mentioned, many contemporary style guides advocate for a single space. This alignment with modern standards has led many writers to adopt the single-space convention to remain compliant with current practices.

2. Visual Clutter

Opponents of the double space argue that it adds unnecessary visual clutter to the text, potentially distracting the reader. In an era where concise communication is valued, unnecessary spacing can detract from the overall flow of the document.

3. Digital Formats

In digital formats, where documents are often viewed on screens, the extra space can disrupt the natural flow of reading. The average reader's eye is accustomed to scanning text that uses the single-space convention, making it more efficient for comprehension.

Best Practices in Legal Writing

When it comes to legal writing, adhering to best practices is essential. Here are some guidelines to consider:

- **Follow Style Guides:** Familiarize yourself with the style guides relevant to your practice area. If your firm or organization has a specific preference, it's best to adhere to that for consistency.
- **Stay Updated:** As conventions evolve, keep abreast of changes in formatting recommendations. What was once standard may no longer apply in the modern context.
- **Prioritize Clarity:** Regardless of the spacing convention you choose, always aim for clarity and precision in your writing. Your primary goal should be to communicate effectively.

Conclusion

The debate over **two spaces after period legal writing** reflects broader changes in writing practices and technology. While the traditional two-space method holds nostalgic value for many, the modern single-space standard is increasingly embraced for its efficiency and alignment with current style guides. As legal professionals navigate this ongoing debate, the focus should remain on clarity, consistency, and effective communication. By understanding the arguments on both sides and adhering to best practices, legal writers can ensure their documents are not only clear but also compliant with contemporary standards.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why is there a debate about using two spaces after a period in legal writing?

The debate stems from differing opinions on readability and formatting preferences, with some arguing that two spaces improve clarity, while others maintain that one space is sufficient and aligns with current typographic standards.

What is the historical reason for using two spaces after a period?

Two spaces after a period were traditionally used in typewritten documents to enhance readability, as typewriters used monospaced fonts that made text appear more uniform and easier to read.

Are there any legal writing style guides that recommend using two spaces after a period?

Most contemporary legal writing style guides, such as The Bluebook and ALWD Guide to Legal Citation, advocate for using a single space after a period, reflecting modern typesetting practices.

How has the transition from typewriters to computers affected spacing after periods in legal documents?

The transition to proportional fonts used in word processing software has led to a shift towards using a single space after periods, as these fonts naturally create adequate spacing without the need for an additional space.

What are the potential consequences of using two spaces after a period in legal documents?

Using two spaces can lead to inconsistencies in formatting and may be viewed as outdated, potentially affecting the professionalism and perceived quality of legal documents.

Is there any legal precedent that addresses the issue of spacing after periods?

While there is no specific legal precedent regarding spacing after periods, adherence to accepted formatting standards is crucial for ensuring clarity and professionalism in legal writing.

What can legal professionals do to stay updated on formatting standards, including spacing after periods?

Legal professionals should regularly consult current style guides, attend writing workshops, and participate in continuing legal education to stay informed about best practices in legal writing and formatting.

What is the consensus among legal writing experts regarding the use of spaces after periods?

The consensus among most legal writing experts is to use a single space after periods, as it aligns with modern typographic conventions and enhances the overall readability of legal documents.

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