Formatting Google Docs for Online Classes

If you are taking an online class at Northwest State, be advised that you cannot submit a Google Doc for an assignment unless your instructor specifically requests it. In most cases, if you use Google Docs to compose your paper, you must then download it as a Word document (.docx) and upload that file to your class. Saving your paper as a Word document can cause some formatting changes. While most are very minor, others can cause problems for you and your instructor. This quick guide will help you avoid two of the most common issues related to formatting your papers.

Page Numbers and/or Name at the Top of the Page

A common requirement for multi-page papers is having your last name and/or the page number in the upper right corner of each page.

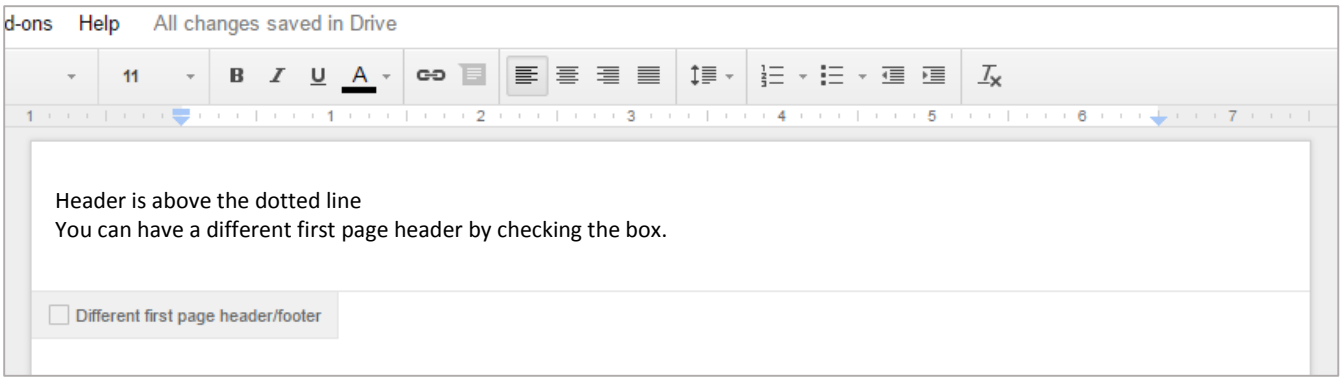
Common Mistake: Students often type their paper, then go back and enter a new line at the top of each page containing their name and the page number. They make this one-line paragraph right-aligned to put it on the right side of the page.

The Problem: When you export the Google Doc as a Word document, line spacing normally changes slightly. While page 1 may still look correct, later pages may have the name and page number pushed further down the page. Imagine a longer document with "*Doe 10*" halfway down the page, instead of at the upper right.

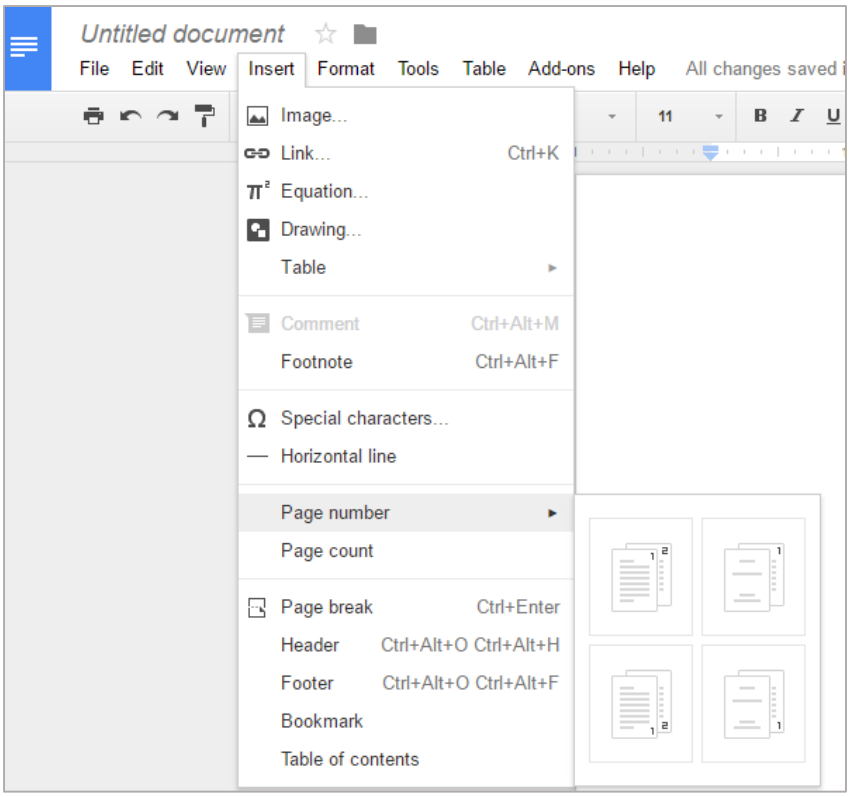
The Solution: Put your name and page number in a header. There's a couple ways to add a header to your Google Doc.

1. Double-click on the very top of page.
2. Click on the Insert menu at the top, and select Header

This will give you an option to add text at the very top of the document, above your paragraphs. This text will repeat on all pages of your paper automatically. Type your name and set it to be right-aligned if that's what your instructor asks.



If you need to add a page number, you do not want to type that directly in the header, otherwise all pages will have the same number appear. Instead, click on the Insert menu and select Page Number. You can select if you have a cover page, in which case, your second page will be counted as page 1. If you need to have your first page have a different header, check the box for *Different first page header/footer*, then put your page number and name on the second page header.



It's worth noting that if you just need the page number, not your name, you can go directly to Insert – Page Number and Google Docs will automatically add the page number in the header.

Works Cited on a New Page

Most papers will require a works cited page. This is usually on a new page.

Common Mistake: Many students will hit the Enter key several times until they are on a new page, then begin typing their Works Cited page.

The Problem: As before, when you download a Google Doc as a Word document, the line spacing can get adjusted slightly. This could result in your Works Cited page starting half-way down the page rather than the top, or having the first entry or two on the last page of your paper, rather than on a new page.

The Solution: Instead of hitting Enter several times to get to a new page, use a page break instead. A page break is always treated as a new page, even when you add or remove text before the break. When your paper is saved as a Word document, the page break translates, so your Works Cited page (or other content) is still on a new page.

There's two easy ways to enter a page break in Google Docs.

1. Click on the Insert menu and select Page Break
2. Hold the CTRL key when you press Enter

Making these small changes as your type your papers in Google Docs will help ensure that your paper is formatted correctly, even when it is saved as a Word document. These are good formatting tips to use any time to help your papers look professional and easily readable. If you have any questions or concerns about your online classes, contact Northwest State's Teaching & Learning Center at distancelearning@NorthwestState.edu or 419-267-1428.