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*Dingbats can be used to
separate paragraphs.*

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Creative Paragraphing

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Indenting the first line of every paragraph is a habit most of us acquired in grammar school. Its purpose 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 the space should be proportionate to the size and column width of the 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.



THE MANUAL

A GUIDE TO TYPOGRAPHIC KNOWLEDGE AND SOLUTIONS

The crickets sang in the grasses. They sang the song of summer's ending, a sad monotonous song. "Summer is over and gone, over and gone, over and gone. Summer is dying, dying." A little maple tree heard the cricket song and turned bright red with anxiety.

The crickets felt it was their duty to warn everybody that summertime cannot last forever. Even on the most beautiful days in the whole year — the days when summer is changing into fall the crickets spread the rumor of sadness and change.

Everybody heard the song of the crickets. Avery and Fern Arable heard it as they walked the dusty road. They knew that school would soon begin again. The young geese heard it and knew that they would never be little goslings again. Charlotte heard it and knew that she hadn't much time left. Mrs. Zuckerman, at work in the kitchen, heard the crickets, and a sadness came over her, too. "Another summer gone," she sighed. Lurvy, at work building a crate for Wilbur, heard the song and knew it was time to dig potatoes.

Too small of an indent does not set off paragraphs adequately.

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A larger indent sets off the paragraphs – and does not interrupt the reading process.



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If you have a lot of space and copious copy, try a hanging indent, or “outdent.”

This technique is 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. If, however, the content has illustrations or other graphic elements, this technique can also create a cluttered page. (Keep things simple.)

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An outdent creates dynamism in the content, but should only be used if columns are wide and text is copious.



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For small blocks of copy, try something more decorative. Use a dingbat or any simple graphic element to separate the paragraphs. You can do this in a couple of ways: either run the paragraphs into each other with only the dingbat separating them, or horizontally center a dingbat between paragraphs which are separated by a line space.

The crickets sang in the grasses. They sang the song of summer's ending, a sad monotonous song. "Summer is over and gone, over and gone, over and gone. Summer is dying, dying." A little maple tree heard the cricket song and turned bright red with anxiety. ★ The crickets felt it was their duty to warn everybody that summertime cannot last forever. Even on the most beautiful days in the whole year — the days when summer is changing into fall the crickets spread the rumor of sadness and change. ★ Everybody heard the song of the crickets. Avery and Fern Arable heard it as they walked the dusty road. They knew that school would soon begin again. The young geese heard it and knew that they would never be little goslings again. Charlotte heard it and knew that she hadn't much time left. Mrs. Zuckerman, at work in the kitchen, heard the crickets, and a sadness came over her, too. "Another summer gone," she sighed. Lurvy, at work building a crate for Wilbur, heard the song and knew it was time to dig potatoes.

A color dingbat can be used to separate paragraphs.



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Another way a color dingbat can be used to separate paragraphs.

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 works well in long blocks of text when saving space is not a consideration.



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An additional line space, with no indenting, can create a clean, open look.

Sometimes, seemingly small typographic changes can have a large bearing on how blocks of copy are received by readers. Paragraph indications is one of those changes.

Paragraphs are from E.B. White's, Charlotte's Web. Text is set in ITC Souvenir Light.