This document intends to provide a step by step guide for formatting a table of contents for use in a thesis or dissertation. The process described uses Microsoft Word 2013, however, a similar process is possible for newer versions of Microsoft Word. There are two main methods for formatting a table of contents: manually and automatically. This guide will go into detail about both methods but will mainly focus on the manual method.

Before beginning, there are a couple of recommendations and notes that are pertinent. For the purposes of a thesis or dissertation, a sample table of contents page can be found on the ECU Graduate School Website (see the “Current Students” tab for a link to informational pages about Vireo and Theses and Dissertations). It is recommended that the table of contents be one of the last pages created in the thesis or dissertation: either leave a blank page as a place holder while creating the work or simply create a new page break where the table of contents is desired to begin. It is also recommended that all of the formatting regarding page numbers is completed before doing this step for ease of verification (especially important for the automatic method). In addition, there are two example table of contents at the back of this guide: they are intended only for visualization purposes. The formatting of text and content should be adjusted to meet your requirements.

Manually Creating a Table of Contents Using Tabs

By default, the tab key moves the cursor forward five spaces and is usually intended to offset the first line of a new paragraph. It is possible and, for the purpose of creating a table of contents, necessary to redefine exactly how far the tab key moves the cursor, the alignment of text typed at the tabbed position, and the leader (or what fills the space between where the cursor was and the tabbed position).

First, let’s become familiar with the Tabs Menu: On the Home Ribbon, find the section for “Paragraph” and click the icon in the bottom right corner of that section. Doing so will open the Paragraph Dialogue Box. In the bottom left corner of this box, there is a button that says “Tabs”. Clicking this will open the Tabs Dialogue Box. (An image of the Tabs Dialogue Box is on the right). There are three sections to this menu: the top section defines where the tab key moves the cursor (notice the default tab stops at 0.5”),
the middle section defines the alignment of the typed text at the tabbed position, and the last section
defines the leader to the tab.

To use this menu, we will type in a specific position in the top left box (where it says Tab Stop Position), select the desired alignment and leader, and then hit “Set”. A list of all the set tabs will appear in the scrolling box underneath the input bar. When a particular set tab is highlighted, the other properties (alignment and leader) change accordingly. For example, in the image on the right a tab is set at the 6” mark, the text typed at that tabbed position will be centered, and the leader is a “………”, meaning from the original position to that tabbed position a line of periods will be filled in. (Leaders will adjust to accommodate text.) Note, you can clear a set tab by highlighting it in the list and selecting “Clear”; or you can clear all set tabs by selecting “Clear All”.

Once tabs are set, and the “OK” button is selected, you will notice on the ruler at the top of the page that some icons have appeared. These icons indicate the set tabs, and are at the set position. The alignment of the tabbed position is also indicated by the icon: a “ ” indicates left aligned, a “ ” indicates right aligned, and “ ” indicates center aligned. (There are other alignments possible, but this guide will not go into detail about them.) You can also open the tabs menu by double clicking on the ruler icon for the tabbed positions, however, this is not recommended as it often creates new, unwanted tabs that will then need to be cleared. Tabs can be set for the entire document, by paragraph, by line, or by highlighted text (multiple lines at once).

Now that we feel comfortable with how to set up, clear, and adjust tabs, we can begin creating the table of contents. There are several ways to go about this task; as you become more comfortable with creating tabs, you may wish to deviate from the method described in this guide. Note, this guide was designed so that creating the table of contents will not affect any other pages in your document. That being said, let us begin creating our table of contents. For your convenience, an example table of contents (at various stages in development) will be referred to, and is included at the end of this guide. Note that this is only an example intended to help demonstrate the steps, and you should use your information to create your table of contents. This method will use two stages: setting up the sections and setting up the tabs and page numbers.

**Stage 1: Setting up the Sections**

For this stage, we will set up the section headings without adjusting the tab settings or adding page numbers. Essentially, we are setting up the skeleton of the table of contents. First, type the title of the page, “Table of Contents” on the first line of the page, centered. Each new heading will start on a new line (use the “enter” key to start a new line). Type left aligned, and with no indentation, the first level headings. Second level headings should be indented once (hit the “Tab” key once), third level headings indented twice (hit the “Tab” key twice), and so on. Set up all of your section headings in this
way. At the end of stage one, you should have all of your section headings in the table of contents. In the example provided, (See the page “END OF STAGE 1”), the level headings are as follows:


• The second level headers are: “Undergraduate Programs” and “Graduate Programs” (under chapter 2) and “Sports”, “Clubs”, and “Outreach Programs” (under chapter 3).

• The third level headers are: “Master’s Programs” and “Doctoral Programs” (under Graduate Programs).

• Finally, the fourth level headers are “Thesis Programs” and “Non-Thesis Programs” (under Master’s Programs).

Stage 2: Setting up the Tabs and Page Numbers

Now that we have the skeleton of the table of contents, it is time to add the leaders and the page numbers. This is where it will be most useful to have your pages already numbered in their footer. We will do this step for every heading level you have (if you have a fourth level heading, then this step will be done four times). We will start with the first level heading:

1. With your mouse, click and select the entire line of the first, first-level heading (the entire heading should be highlighted).
2. Using the “Ctrl” key, select every other first level heading: press and hold the “Ctrl” key while highlighting the first level headings with your mouse. (Note, you can highlight more than one heading at once if they are in subsequent lines. Also note, the “shift” key can also be used). This step can be ignored, but you will need to do the following steps for every first level heading; highlighting all of them allows you to set the tabs for all of them at once.
3. With the first level headings highlighted, open the Tabs Dialogue Box (Home Ribbon, Paragraph section, pop out menu icon; see above).
4. Set up the following tabs:
   a. Position: 6.0”; Alignment: Left; Leader: 2 ……
   b. Position: 6.5”; Alignment: Right; Leader: 1 None

Because these headings were the first level heading, there was no indentation that needed to be preserved. In subsequent headings, an extra tab will be needed to preserve the indentation (detailed below).

Note: the settings above do not make the leader go all the way to the page number (as seen in the example, see MIDDLE OF STAGE 2). If it is desired to have the leader go all the way to the page number, only use one tab: Position: 6.5”; Alignment: Right; Leader: 2 ......

Note: the positions above assume a 1” margin on the document (the default setting). If you are using different margins, you will need to adjust these numbers accordingly.

5. Press “OK”. If the previous step was done correctly, the table of contents should NOT change appearance.
6. Place your cursor immediately following the text of the first, first-level heading.
7. Press the “Tab” key. This should move your cursor to the 6” inch mark and leave a leader of periods.
8. Press the “Tab” key, again. This should move your cursor to the 6.5” inch mark (leaving no leader). Here is where you will type the page number.
9. Type the page number of this heading. (You will need to look up the page number in your document. Note, this can be any type of number: Roman Numeral, Arabic, etc.)

10. Place your cursor on the next first level heading. Press the “Tab” key twice. Type the page number for that heading.

11. Repeat step 10 until all of the first level headings have been labeled with their page number.

   You can see in the example at the end of this document (See the page MIDDLE OF STAGE 2) how progress in these steps should proceed.

At this point, all of your first level headings should have a leader and a page number associated with them. Now we will repeat the process above for the second, third, fourth, and so on, level headings with one crucial addition: the preservation of the indentations that offset the level headings in the first place. In order to offset the second level heading, we hit the “Tab” key once. The third level heading has two indentions (“Tab” key twice) and the fourth level heading has three indentions (“Tab” key three times). It is a simple matter to preserve these indentions: we will simply add another tab setting in step 4 above.

- For the second level headings:
  - Position: 0.5”; Alignment: Left; Leader: 1 None
  - Position: 6.0”; Alignment: Left; Leader: 2 ........
  - Position: 6.5”; Alignment: Right; Leader: 1 None

- For the third level headings:
  - Position: 0.5”; Alignment: Left; Leader: 1 None
  - Position: 1.0”; Alignment: Left; Leader: 1 None
  - Position: 6.0”; Alignment: Left; Leader: 2 ........
  - Position: 6.5”; Alignment: Right; Leader: 1 None

- For the fourth level headings:
  - Position: 0.5”; Alignment: Left; Leader: 1 None
  - Position: 1.0”; Alignment: Left; Leader: 1 None
  - Position: 1.5”; Alignment: Left; Leader: 1 None
  - Position: 6.0”; Alignment: Left; Leader: 2 ........
  - Position: 6.5”; Alignment: Right; Leader: 1 None

Again, you will set the above tabs only when the selected headings are highlighted. This ensures that the rest of your document remains unchanged by these settings. The added tabs for each indentation simply match the indent that was put there by hitting the “Tab” key in stage 1. If you have a fifth level heading, you would add another tab setting at the 2.0” position. Any further levels of headings will have an additional tab setting moved up 0.5” from the previous tab. After the tabs are set, pick back up with step 5 above ensuring that you are working with the correct level heading. Once you have completed the task for all levels of headings, your table of contents will be complete and should look something like the example (see END OF STAGE 2).

Congratulations! Your table of contents is now complete.
Automatically Creating a Table of Contents Using Headings

This method involves using Microsoft Word’s built-in Table of Contents creator. This tool refers to your text and looks for specific formatting that indicates the headings that would appear in a table of contents. To use this tool, you will need to have your page numbers formatted to your specifications. In addition, you will need to go through your document to find all the headings you want to appear in the table of contents. The formatting word is looking for is a particular style, specifically “Heading 1”, “Heading 2”, and “Heading 3”. (**It has not been confirmed if this tool will recognize beyond heading three. Thus, if you have more than three heading levels, you might want to use the manual method described above.)

The steps to use this tool are as follows:

1. Start at the beginning of your document.
2. Find the heading text that you wish to appear in the table of contents, for example:
   CHAPTER 1:  INTRODUCTION TO EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY.
3. Highlight the text with your mouse.
4. Under the Home Ribbon, in the “Styles” section, select the style “Heading 1” (or “Heading 2” or “Heading 3”) if it is a first level heading (or second or third level).
5. NOTE: selecting a style WILL change the formatting of the text. You will need to reformat the text back to its original formatting. Do not worry, the style will still be applied to that text. The formatting may include: bullets or numbering, font color, font type, boldness, alignment, spacing, etc.
6. Repeat steps 2 – 5 until all of the headings have been labeled with the appropriate style. (The style “Heading 3” may not appear on the ribbon until “Heading 2” is used.)
7. Now that you have all of the headings labeled with the appropriate style, navigate to where you want the table of contents to be constructed.
8. Click the References Ribbon at the top of the screen, and in the first section, “Table of Contents”, select the drop down menu that says “Table of Contents”.
9. Select either “Automatic Table 1” or “Automatic Table 2”.
10. A table will appear with the headings you identified. This table can be edited for formatting preference, and even the page numbers can be changed. This table also has a function to “Update Table”; so if you make changes to your document like altering the page numbers or adding a new heading, you can select the “Update Table” to automatically update the table of contents. This option is found in the References Ribbon or upon clicking the table itself. The table of contents at the end of this document (see AUTOMATIC TABLE OF CONTENTS) was created using this method for the major points in this document.
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