

## Advice for AAEM editors: Manuscript format issues

The advice below is intended to avoid wasting time wrestling with files that behave badly.

### 1. Manuscript check-in

#### 1.1. Always check all incoming files for viruses and other malware.

**1.2. Backup file.** Before you do anything, save the authors' file exactly as it entered your e-mail inbox. Always keep this file handy. It's a good idea to change the filename slightly when you save the file you will be working on yourself. Then you'll have two backup copies: one in your own folder and another in your email inbox. For files with more than one round of tracked changes, you sometimes need to go back and check the author's original file.

**1.3. Basic formatting.** The first thing I do is reformat the whole manuscript so that it complies with the basic format rules followed by almost all journals. To do this I set the font to Times New Roman 12 cpi, set the language to US English (if the journal requires UK English that can be fixed later), set the alignment to left only, and remove default leading (extra horizontal spacing) before and after paragraph breaks (between paragraphs and before or after headings and subheadings) so that all 4 settings are 0 and none of them are Auto or any value other than 0.

### 2. Track changes

**2.1. As a training aid.** It's helpful to deliver to authors the manuscript with your changes tracked (at least your first round of changes) in addition to your final, clean version.

**2.2. Required by the editor.** For manuscripts that are revised and are going to be resubmitted to the same journal, the editor may ask the authors to track all changes with Word's tool. Find out from the author if the file must show tracked changes or not.

Usually just highlighting the changed text in the final edited version (with a yellow background or a different font color), with track changes turned off, is acceptable to the editor. Usually, editors and reviewers want to see where the changes are but don't need the tracking since they are usually not going to check and individually accept or reject each change themselves. Often they will use the words "track changes" only to mean "show me where the changes are somehow" and not necessarily "use Word's track changes tool".

**2.3. Problems.** Often, the previous round of changes will light up when you open the file, even if the author has accepted the changes and saved the clean ms. This is a major glitch in MS Word.

Some versions of Word will "forget" your default settings when they open files created with a different version of Windows/Word. If the **previous round of changes appears when you open the file**, and if you are sure that the author did not intend the file to appear this way: 1) turn off track changes (important!) if it is on, 2) accept all changes,

and 3) save the file with a slightly different filename, and 4) edit it as you usually would.

In addition to showing you the changes in a file in which the previous user has already accepted them, **Word may also “forget” the most recent round of changes**, which are simply lost when the next user opens the file on a different system. This can be irritating and have a potentially negative impact on the manuscript’s chances of acceptance. In my experience most users of Windows/Word don’t realize that this problem exists. When they see uncorrected errors that were actually corrected but that Word lost, they assume the previous person (author, coauthor, AAEM editor, etc.) did not do a good job with the manuscript. This is why it is a good idea to keep good records of all files you deliver, in case it becomes necessary at any time to trace where the errors came from.

If the track changes tool behaves unreliably, always change the filename slightly each time you save it, for all versions—both those that show the tracked changes and the clean version (after accepting all changes). This is the only workaround I’ve found to “trick” Word into remembering the changes.

I’ve encountered these problems even in files created with registered, up-to-date versions of Windows. The compatibility between different versions of Word and Windows is not as good as MS claims. Sometimes there is a patch on the MS website that fixes the problem. You need to make sure the patch you download is for your version of Windows/Word. You also have to previously register your version of Windows on the machine you use; otherwise MS won’t let you have the patches and updates.

**3. Right-to-left alignment.** Sometimes, when you ask Word to show you where the paragraph marks are, you may find some on the left end (the beginning) of a line, or even in the middle of a line. This is a sign of right-to-left alignment; another sign is your cursor moving in the direction opposite to that shown on the arrow key, or when it’s impossible to place your mouse pointer at exactly the place you want in a line. A more obvious sign, of course, is the text appearing right-aligned rather than left-aligned.

You can remove the right-to-left alignment by deleting the offending paragraph mark, which sometimes only works if you use the backspace key but not the delete key. Sometimes you need to do some experimenting with moving the text ahead, then back, while trying to delete the rogue code (paragraph mark) to get rid of right alignment. Sometimes you have to delete a small part of the actual text to get the code to disappear; then you have to retype the text.

The alignment for some paragraphs or the whole document is sometimes right-aligned instead of left-aligned. In Windows 10 and later versions there is an option in Tools / Options / Compatibility (I think) where you can reset the direction of the text from left-to-right. (Windows 10 is full of new options that fix problems that shouldn’t occur in the first place.)

**4. Unnecessary formatting.** Sometimes authors will use a fancy template or fancy formatting that can make the file behave badly because of version compatibility issues. Since journals almost always say explicitly in their instructions or guidelines *not* to use any fancy formatting, I usually take it all out. This goes for automatic numbering, any

styles used for paragraphs or lists (numbered, outline, bulleted list with whatever symbol, etc.) and of course (especially) styles for the title page, headings and subheadings. Everything should always be in plain Times New Roman 12 cpi. Left alignment (not right-justified, not centered) should always be used. Bold and italics are okay as needed.

These tricks usually make the file behave better and can avoid the need to resort to ascii, which would not be acceptable to the author or the journal. If you work with an ascii file you have to go back later and put the bold and italics back in manually, and you have to watch out for disastrous loss of formatting in the references and tables.

Newer versions of Windows have all sorts of features that load up the files with codes that can cause accidents anytime. Language and alphabet default settings can be hard to manage. Most people don't realize that the language you want needs to be set for the keyboard and also for the particular file in the particular software involved. Forgetting any of these settings can cause the file to behave badly when it is opened on a machine different from the one it was created on.

Sometimes a file behaves so badly that I ask the authors to prepare a version with left alignment throughout and with US English as the language on their own system. But I save this as a last resort.

Most problems can usually be fixed somehow in newer versions of Windows. The trick is to find the solution is in all those hundreds of menus and options. Lots of useful and frequently used things are well hidden and not in the "obvious" place.