Two Spaces After a Period

Were you taught to put two spaces after a period at the end of a sentence? Many people were, but now most publications recommend using just one. Here's the scoop.

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If you learned to type on a typewriter, you're going to hate what I say next: **Do not put two spaces after a period**. Don't do it. Just use one.

I know. I was taught to use two spaces after a period in my high school typing class too, but you know what? It's not that hard to break the habit. I haven't been tempted to type two spaces for decades. It's not like quitting smoking. I don't find myself in nostalgic typewriting situations and suddenly get hit by an unexpected urge to type two spaces.

The modern and easy-to-follow style is to put one space after a period.

I'm not making this up to torment you. Typesetters write and beg me to tell people to only use one space. If you use two spaces, they have to delete them. Yes, it's not that hard to do it with search-and-replace, but it's not that hard to put dishes in the dishwasher either, and you don't like doing that, do you?

If sympathy for typesetters doesn't move you, I'm willing to bet you're a rule follower. I don't have a lot of to-heck-with-the-rules type of readers or listeners. And everyone who makes the rules today agrees: It's a one-space world.

The Chicago Manual of Style, the *US Government Printing Office Style Manual,* and the *AP Stylebook* are just a few of the style guides that recommend one space after a period.

The Shift to One Space After a Period

The story of spaces after periods is often told as though monospaced typewriter fonts needed two spaces after a sentence for good readability, and that the wide availability of proportional fonts on computers led to the switch to one space. In monospaced fonts, the letters are all the same width, so an *i* is the same width as an *m*, but in proportional fonts the letters are different widths, so an *i* is much narrower than an *m*.

But the story of spaces at the end of sentences may be more complicated than the traditional lore because in the years of professional printing before the typewriter, typesetters tended to use wide spaces at the end of sentences whether their fonts were monospaced or proportional.

So, while it is true that during the era of the typewriter, two spaces ruled, **once computers became the dominant tool for typing, one space became the standard**.