General Setup
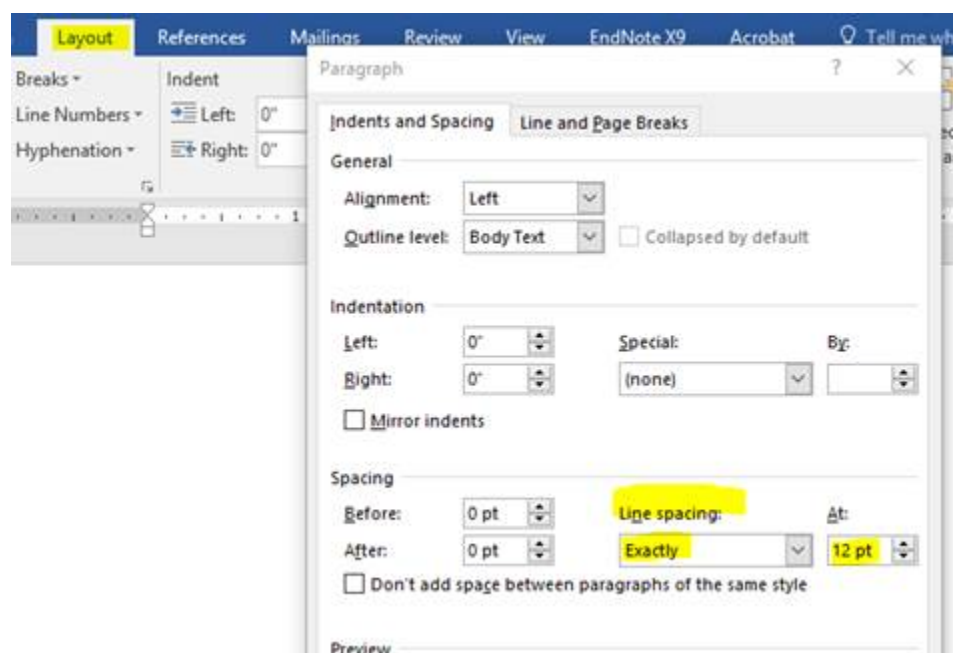
Full guidance: https://grants.nih.gov/grants/how-to-apply-application-guide/format-and-write/format-attachments.htm

NIH requires documents to use:

- A paper size no larger than standard letter paper size (8 ½" x 11")
- at least one-half inch margins (½") - top, bottom, left, and right - for all pages

Line Spacing

NIH requires that documents contain no more than six lines per vertical inch. To ensure there are no more than 6 lines per inch, you can set line spacing in the document to "exactly 12 pt." This can be done in the paragraph settings panel in Word's layout tab:

This works by setting each line in the document to take up 12 points of space. In typography settings there are 72 points per inch, so this sets the document to allow only 6 lines per inch. Once you've done that, you can double check the number of lines on a page by using the line numbers feature in Word and set the display count to "restart each page." This will display a line count per page in the far left margin of the document. If everything is set correctly, you should find no more than 60 lines of text on each page per 8.5"x11" page with 0.5" margins.
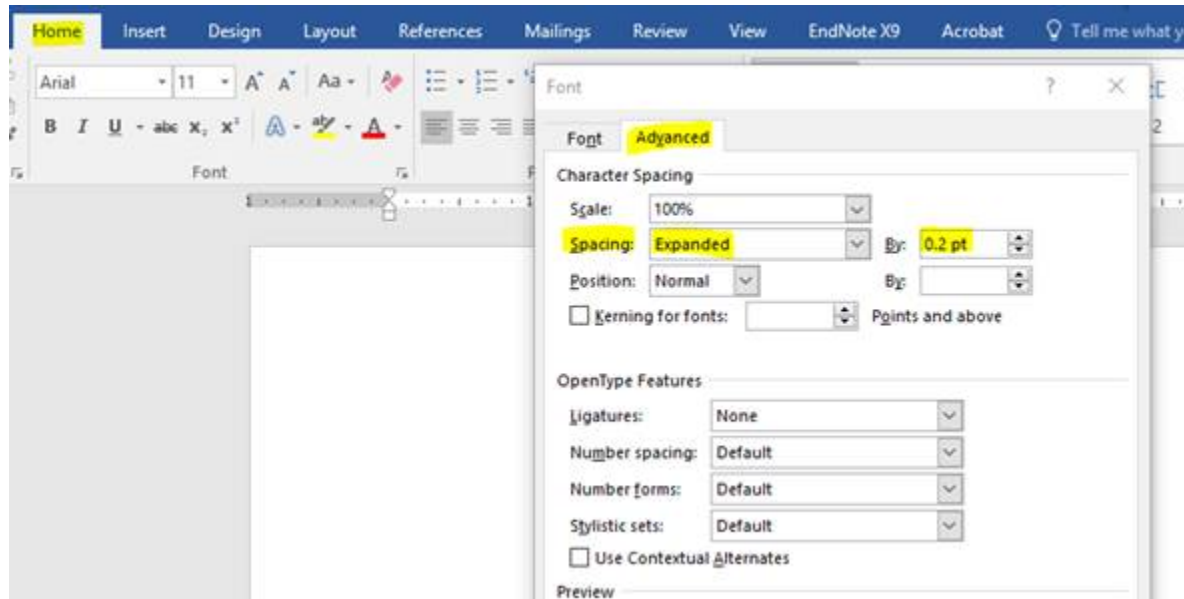
Font Size / Type Density

NIH requires the use of a font that is at least 11 pt in size and generally recommends the use of either Arial, Georgia, Helvetica, or Palatino Linotype. However, they also go on to state that there must be no more than 15 characters per linear inch (including characters and spaces). On an 8.5"x11" page with 0.5" margins, this would mean a maximum of 112 characters per line.

We have found that in practice Arial 11 pt font, which most investigators use, does **not** always conform to the 15 characters per linear inch guidance. We have found that it most often seems to not conform when the document is set to use the justified alignment paragraph settings. That setting will sometimes contract text to the point where there are 120 characters or more per line.

With the other investigators who have experienced scrutiny from CSR, we found moving to Georgia font in 11.5 pt size made sure that the character count per line, including spaces, stayed just under 112 characters.

If you prefer to continue using Arial 11 as your font, we then recommend you update the advanced settings in font panel on Word's home tab to the following:

The expanded spacing set to 0.2 pt allows for slightly more room between each character without being visually disruptive to the reader. This slight expansion seems to be enough to ensure that the character count per line, including spaces, stays just under 112 characters.