

Make Tables Easier to Read in Word

What

Instructions to create a table that is easy to read by having different color for the background of the header row and other formatting of the header row to make the column headers stand out and easy to identify. Shading every other row in the rest of the table will make it easier to follow the data in a row across the columns. Also included are instructions to add this custom table style to your Normal template so it is available for all new documents. Instructions to use this custom table style in other documents that don't have your custom table style is also included.

Why

Long tables are often hard to read in making sure you follow the same row across the columns of the table. This becomes even more difficult when the column headers don't repeat on each page. You can make the table easier to read by:

- Repeat header row on top of
- each page.
- Shade the header row a different color from the alternative row shading colors.
- A thicker (bolder) line to separate the header row from the other rows.
- Text in header row is centered in each column and is in Bold type.
- Shade every other row for the rest of the table.

The instructions below explain how to create the above table as a Table Style which can be added to your Normal template. This allows the Table Style of colored Header row and alternative shaded rows to apply to any size table of different number of columns and rows in any new document based upon that Normal template. Instructions for using this custom Table Style on existing tables in documents that do not have your custom Table style is also included. What this means is that after you create your custom table style, you will be able to change any table you want to that style with just a few clicks and you won't have to manually create this table style again.

Note: The instructions and screenshots are from Word 2019, but should apply to many different versions of Word.

How

Create a Custom Table Style

It is easier to learn how to make a custom table style by using an example. You can then used what you learned to create your own custom table style. It is not necessary to set all the details I show in my example, but I did so to demonstrate how detail you can make your custom table to get it exactly like you want without manually editing each time.

- Open a new document in Word.
- Insert a table into the document. It does not matter how many columns or rows the table has as the table provides access to the table settings. Make it have at least 4 or 5 rows so you can see the alternating shading of the rows.

- Select the table you just enter which displays the Table Design tab on the ribbon above and select that Table Design tab.
- In the Table style Options group make sure Header Row and Banded Rows are selected as shown in the image below. You can also select Branded Columns if you desire alternating shaded columns. Selections here make those option available when creating the custom table style.

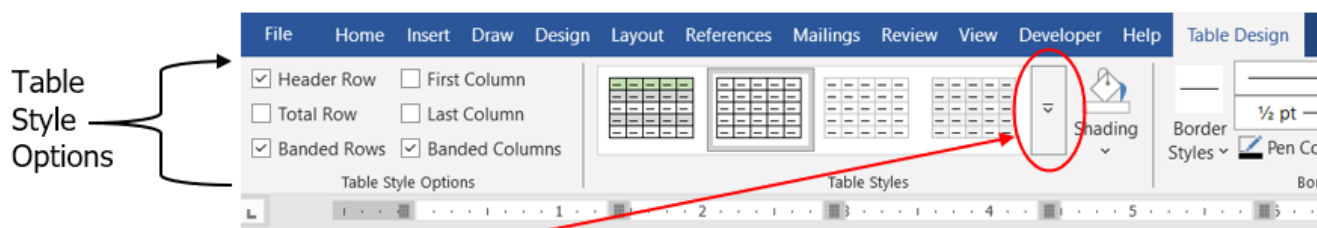
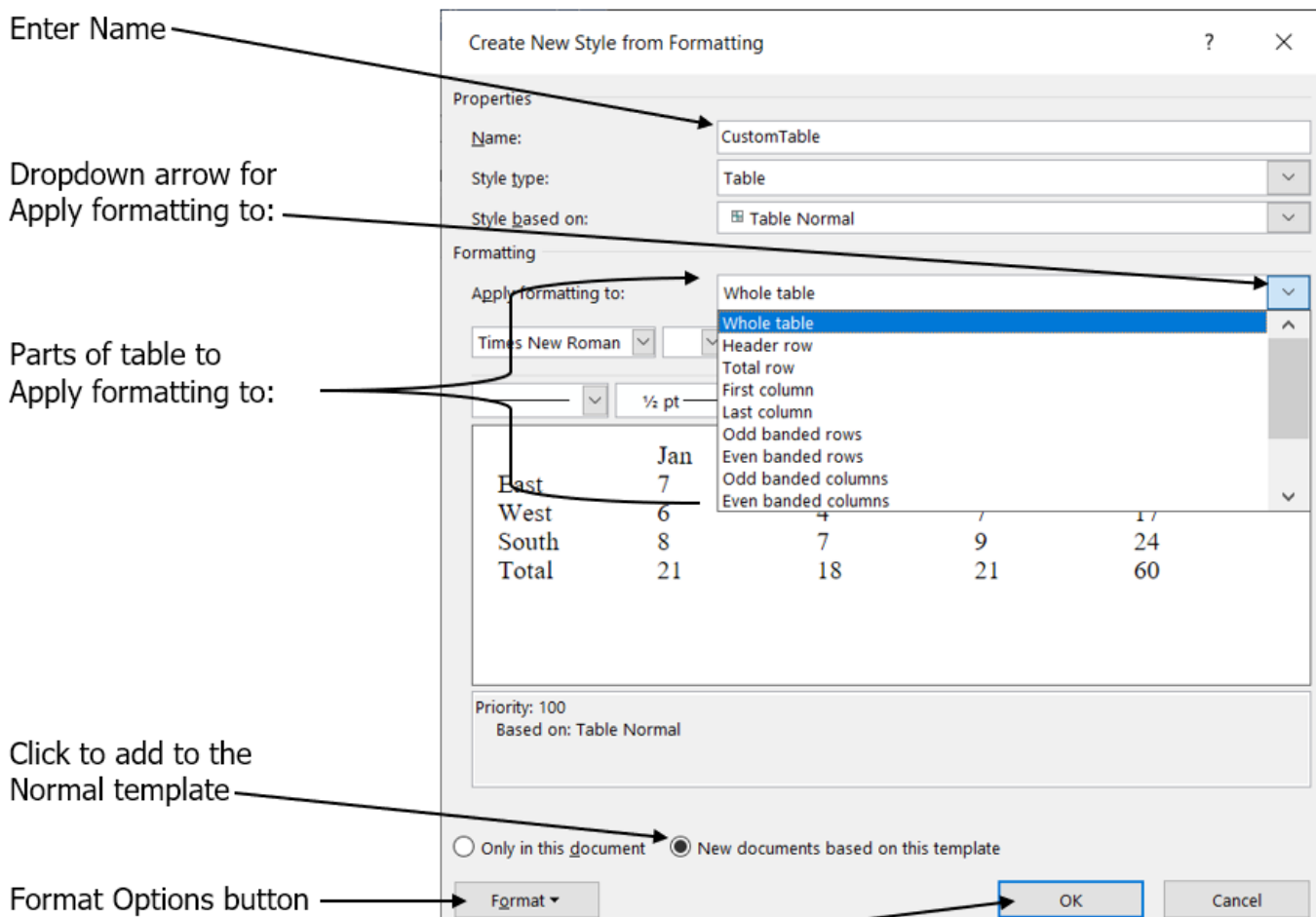


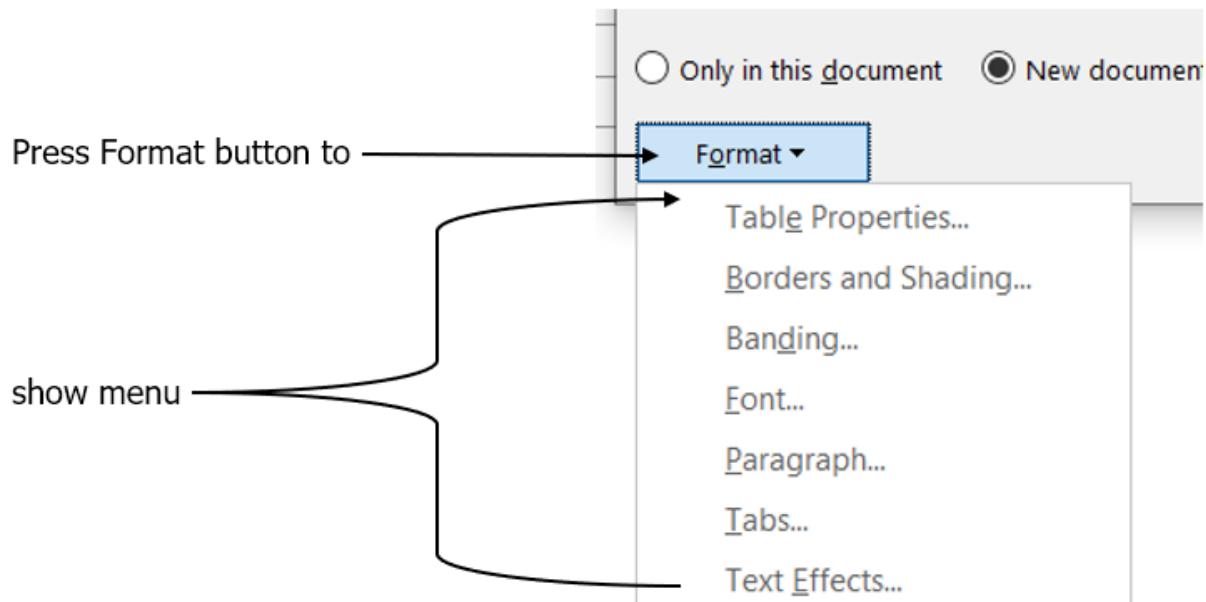
Table Styles dropdown list

- In the Table Styles group click the dropdown arrow to the right of the style icons as shown in the image above to display the table styles. Select *New Table style* at the bottom of the list. This will open the Create New Style window as shown below. You can also open the Create New Style window with the keyboard shortcut: Press and release each of these keys in this order — *Alt, J, T, S, and N*.

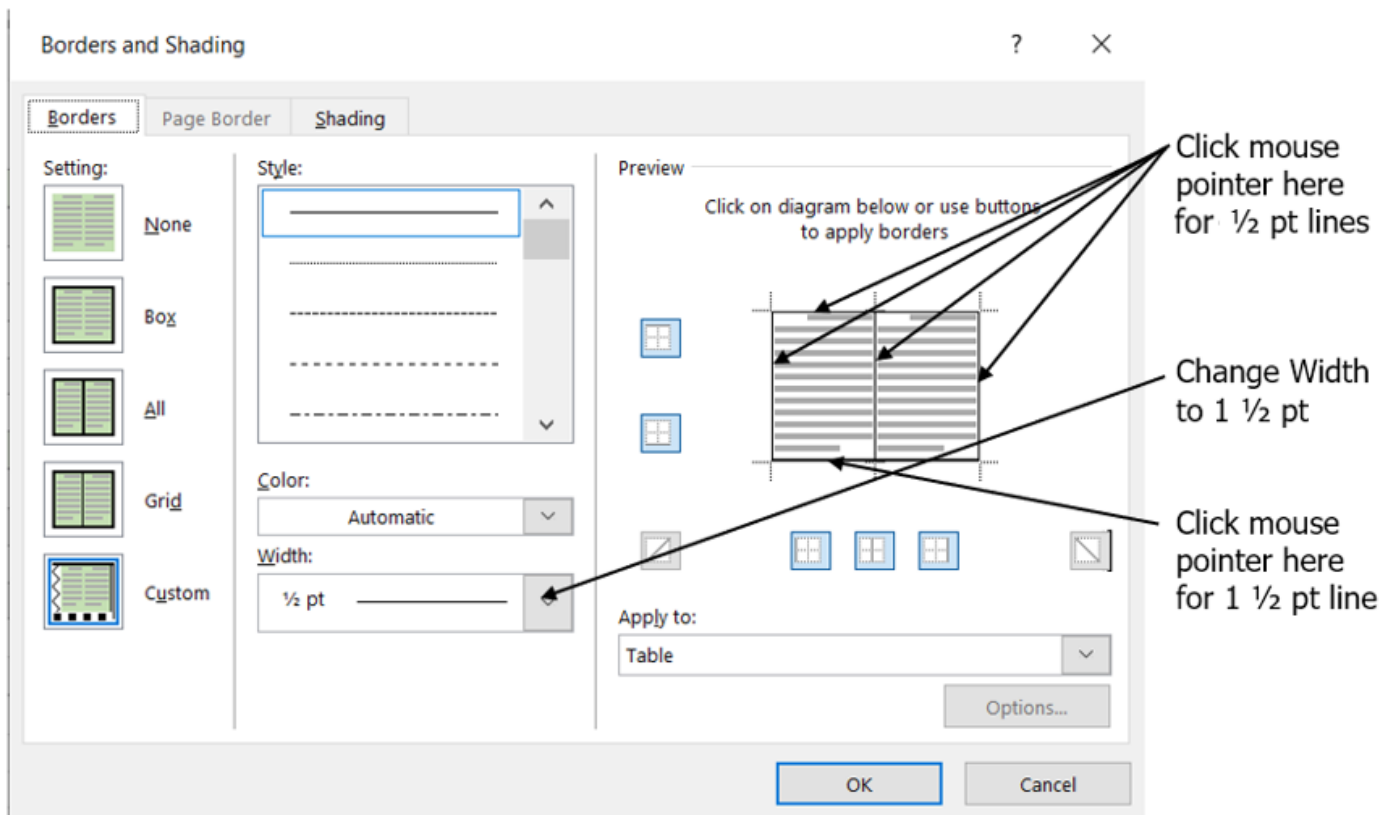


- Enter a name for this custom table style. I selected *CustomTable*.

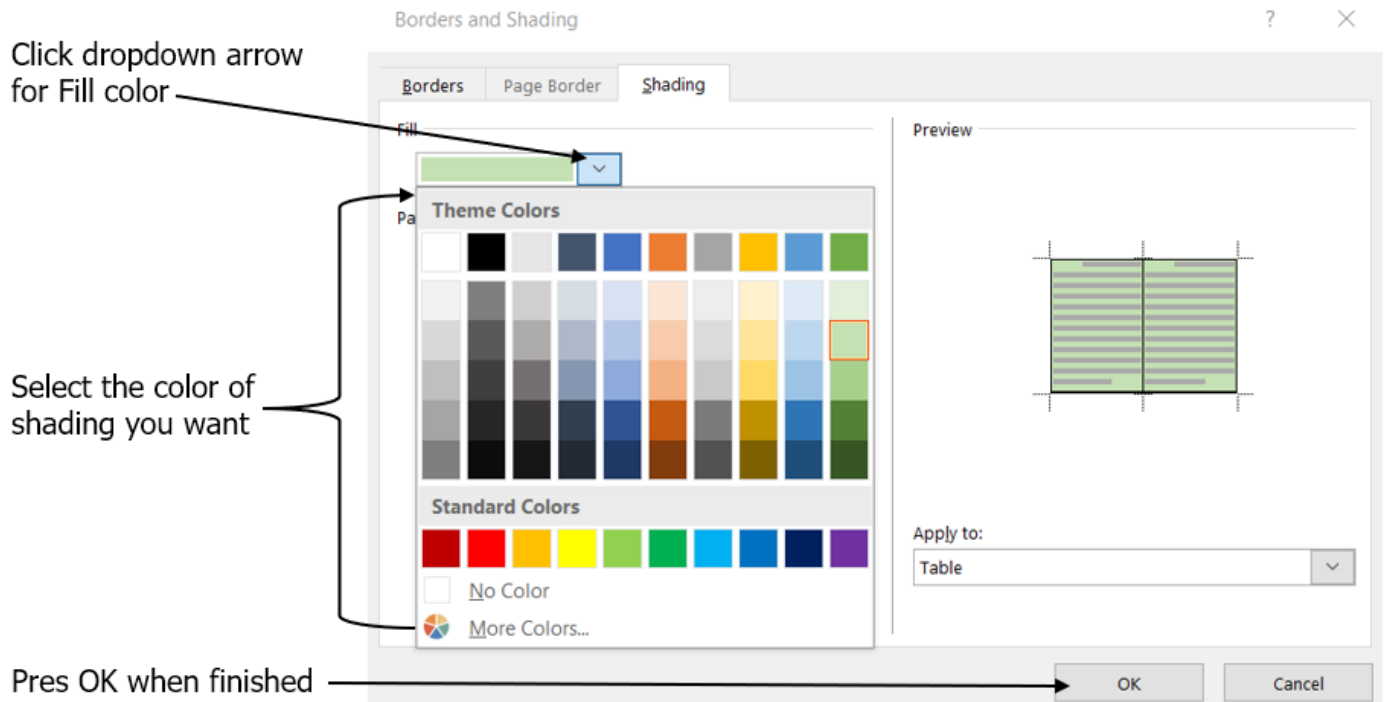
- Notice the dropdown arrow in the *Apply formatting to:* box that displays all the parts of a table. We will return to this several times as we build our custom table part by part.
- Notice *New documents based on this template*. This must be selected before clicking OK to save the custom table style to your Normal template.
- The Format button displays the Format options as shown below.



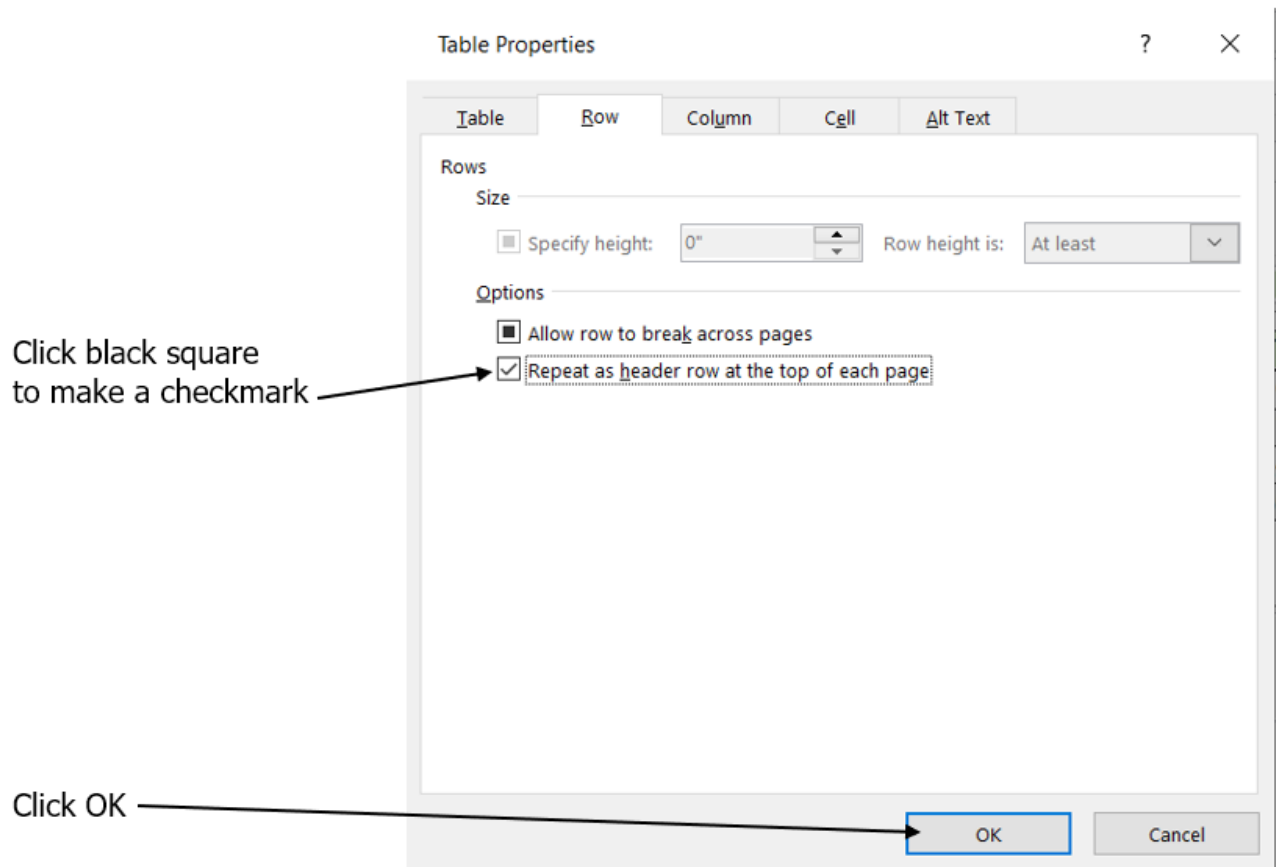
- Do not click the OK button until you have formatted all parts of the table.
- Click the dropdown arrow for *Apply formatting to:* and select *Header row*.
- Press the Format button and select *Borders and Shading...* which will open the Borders and Shading window. Select the Borders tab as shown below.



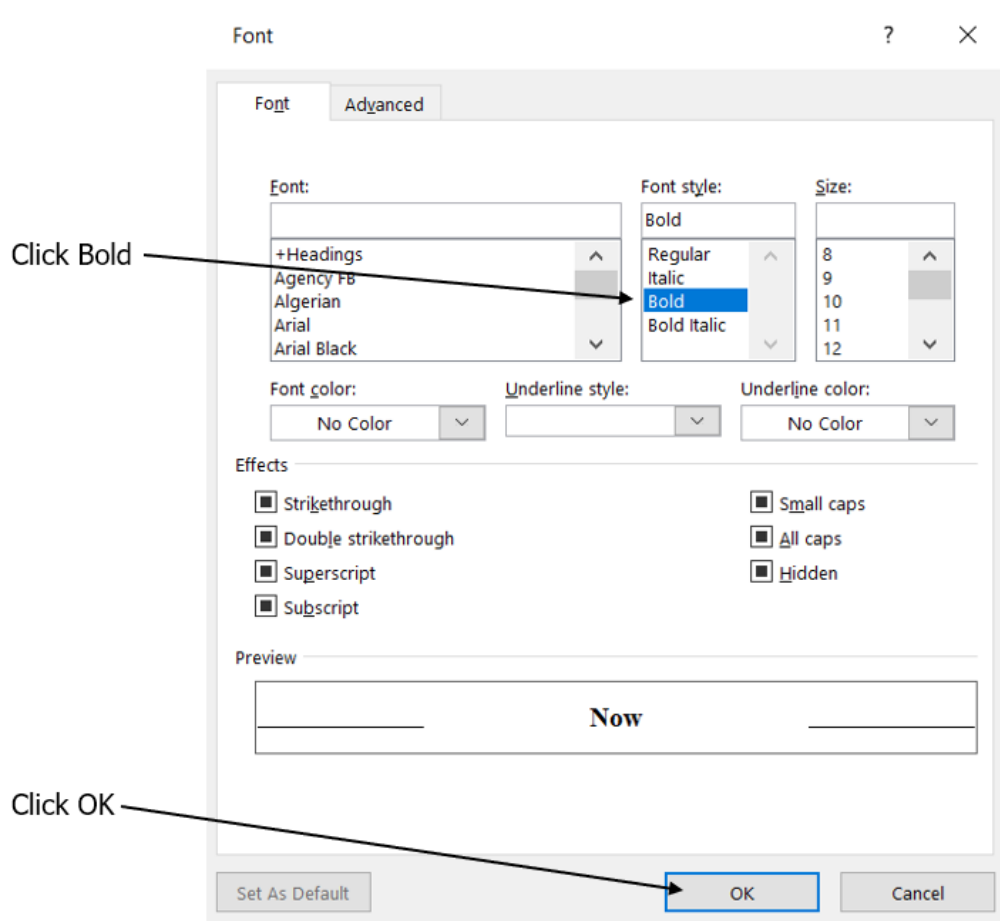
- Place the mouse pointer on the border lines for the border of the row in the Preview image and click to place the ½ pt thick line to the top, sides, and middle border lines as shown in the image above.
- Click the dropdown arrow for the Width box and select 1 ½ pt thick line. Place the mouse pointer on the bottom line and click to place the 1 ½ pt thick line there. This creates the Header row with a darker line across the bottom of the row separating it from the rows of data.
- Click the Shading tab to display that page as shown below.



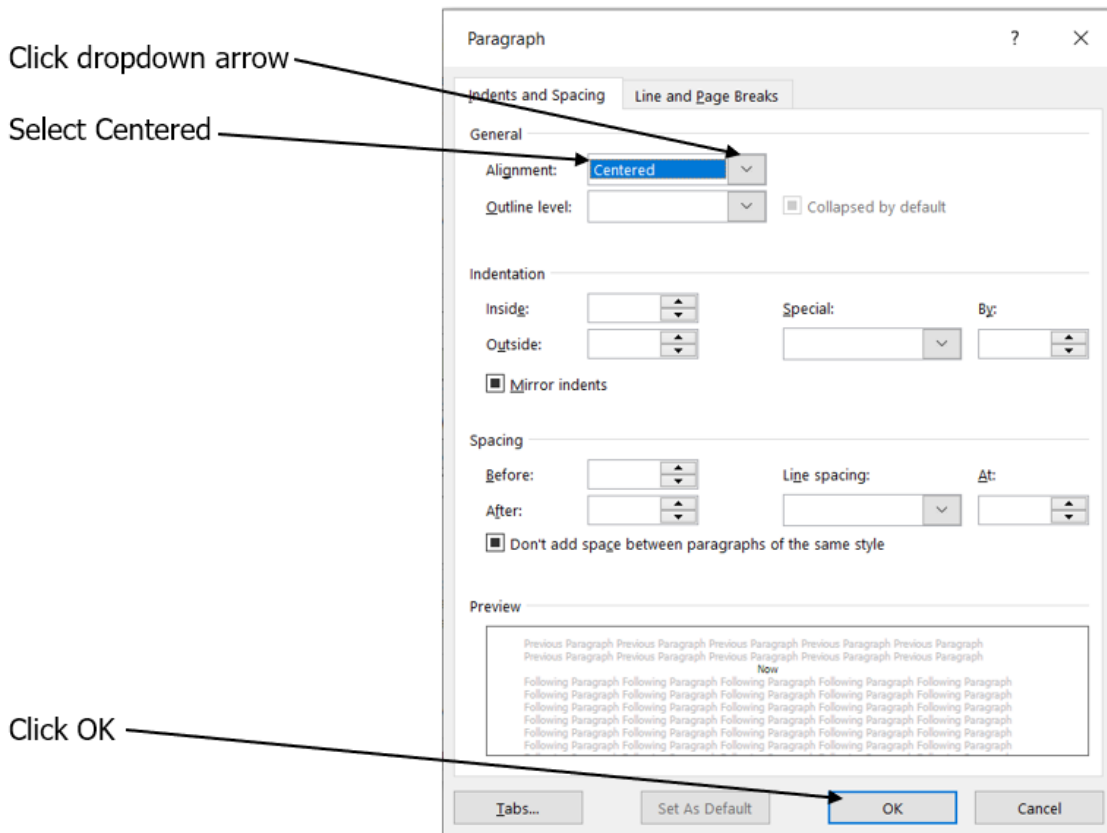
- Click the dropdown arrow in the Fill box to select the color of shading you want for the Header row. Keep it light as the text has to be readable on this colored background.
- Press OK to close the Borders and Shading window and return to the Create New Style window. The Preview window will display changes as you make them.
- With the Header row still selected in the *Apply formatting to:* box, press the Format button and select *Table Properties...* which will open that window as shown below.



- On the Row tab, under Options click the black square box to the left of *Repeat as header row at the top of each page* to turn the black square to a checkmark and apply this option. Click OK to close the Table Properties window and return to the Create New Style window.
- With the Header row still selected in the *Apply formatting to:* box, press the Format button and select *Font...* which will open that window as shown below.



- Place the mouse pointer on Bold in the *Font style:* box as shown in the image above and click to set the Font style as Bold. This will make all text in the header row in Bold type no matter what Font is used. Click OK to save your changes and close the window to return to thew Create New Style window.
- With the Header row still selected in the *Apply formatting to:* box, press the Format button and select *Paragraph...* which will open that window as shown below.



- On the Indents and Spacing tab of that Paragraph window click the dropdown arrow to the right of the *Alignment:* box and click Centered. This will keep text centered in each column. Press the OK button to save your changes, close the window and return to the Create New Style window.
- In the Create New Style window click the dropdown arrow for *Apply formatting to:* and select *Even banded rows*.
- Press the Format button and select *Borders and Shading...* which will open the Borders and Shading window. Select the Borders tab as shown in the prior image.
- Under Settings on the Border tab select *All* to place the ½ pt border lines around and in between the columns in the even rows.
- Select the Shading tab. Click the dropdown arrow for Fill box and select a color different from that you chose for the header row. Keep it a light color so the text is easily to read. I chose a light gray color.
- Press the OK button to save, close the Borders and Shading window, and return to the create New Style window.
- In the Create New Style window click the dropdown arrow for *Apply formatting to:* and select *Odd banded rows*.
- Press the Format button and select *Borders and Shading...* which will open the Borders and Shading window. Select the Borders tab as shown in the prior image.
- Under Settings on the Border tab select *All* to place the ½ pt border lines around and in between the columns in the odd rows.
- You do not need to select the Shading tab as these odd rows will have no color.
- Press the OK button to save, close the Borders and Shading window, and return to the Create New Style window.
- The Preview window will show you what your custom table style looks like.
- Make sure *New documents based on this template* is selected (black dot).
- Press the OK button to save your custom table style to your Normal template.

Use a Custom Table Style in a New Document

- In a new document, use the Insert Table under Tables of the Insert tab to insert a table with the number of columns and rows you want.
- Select the table and select the Table Design tab in the ribbon above.
- In the Table Styles group click the dropdown arrow to display the list of table styles.
- Your custom table style will be on the first line under Custom. Click that custom style and the table in the document will change to that style ready for data entry.

Note: If you use this custom style all the time for your tables, you can modify the default table style that is inserted when you click the Insert Table button and have your custom table style become the default table style so when that button is pressed....replacing table style will not be necessary.

Use a Custom Table Style in an Older or Different Document

- The following instructions explain how use your custom table style in an older or from a different Word app documents where your custom table style is not in the templates that those documents were made from. This allows you to use your custom table style in any Word document you can open and edit.
- Open a new document (which has your custom table style).
- Open the older or different document that has the table you want to change the style.
- In this older document select the table and copy it (Ctrl + C).
- Switch to the new document window and click to activate the cursor on the first line in the document.
- Press and release the following keys in this order: *Alt, H, V, K* (this is Paste - keep source formatting).
- With the pasted table selected, select the Table Design tab in the ribbon above.
- In the Table Styles group click the dropdown arrow to display the list of table styles.
- Your custom table style will be on the first line under Custom. Click that custom style and the table in the document will change to that style with the same data still there.
- Select the changed table and copy.
- Return to the older document, select the table.
- Right click and select Delete Table. The table will delete and the cursor is flashing where the old table started. Don't worry if the rest of the document appears skewed for now. Delete the table first and don't try to paste over the old table.
- Press and release the following keys in this order: *Alt, H, V, K* (this is Paste - keep source formatting).
- This will replace the table with all the data and size it was, but with your custom style.
- This custom style will now appear in the Table Styles list and can be used directly for any other tables in the document.
- Saving the document will keep that table style in the document.

Side Note: Using the method above another user can copy a table with your custom style to one of their new documents which will appear in that document's Table Styles list. If that user selects to Modify that style, and then selects *New documents based on this template*, and clicks OK will add that custom table style to his Normal template for his future use.