



HEADERS, FOOTERS, AND PAGE NUMBERS IN WORD

Untangling One of Word's Most Confusing Features

Headers and footers hold repeating information. Page numbers are fields that live inside them. Use section breaks and the right settings to control where and how they appear.

HOW IT WORKS TOGETHER
HEADER
The area at the top of the page.
FOOTER
The area at the bottom of the page.
PAGE NUMBER
A field inserted in the header, footer, or at the current cursor location.
SECTION
A portion of the document with its own formatting rules.

1 TITLE PAGE
No page number displayed.
(header area)
The Story of Our Town
By Curtis J. Smothers
(footer area)
SETTING USED
Different First Page
Hides the number only on the first page of this section.

2 FRONT MATTER
Roman numerals: i, ii, iii, ...
Our Town
Dedication i
Acknowledgments ii
Preface iii
Table of Contents iv
iv
SETTINGS USED
✓ Next Page Section Break after title page
✓ Link to Previous: OFF
✓ Page Number Format: Roman numerals (i, ii, iii)
Start at: i

3 MAIN TEXT
Arabic numerals start at 1.
Chapter One
Chapter One A New Beginning
Every town has a story. Ours began long before anyone can remember...
1
SETTINGS USED
✓ Next Page Section Break before Chapter One
✓ Link to Previous: OFF
✓ Page Number Format: 1, 2, 3, ...
Start at: 1

4 DIFFERENT ODD & EVEN PAGES
Book title on the left, chapter on the right.
ODD PAGE HEADER
Our Town Chapter Two
EVEN PAGE HEADER
Chapter Two Our Town
14
SETTING USED
Different Odd & Even Pages
Places information toward the outside edges of facing pages.

5 APPENDIX
Appendix title in header. Page numbering continues.
Appendix A
Appendix A Survey Results
87
SETTINGS USED
✓ Next Page Section Break before Appendix
✓ Link to Previous: OFF
✓ Keeps same numbering (continues from main text)

INSERT A HEADER OR FOOTER
Double-click near the top or bottom margin.
Insert Draw Design Layout References
Header Footer Page Number
Header & Footer
Type here...
Footer area
Close Header and Footer when you're done.

INSERT A PAGE NUMBER
Insert tab → Page Number
Top of Page Bottom of Page Page Margins Current Position
Word inserts a field that updates automatically.
Format Page Numbers...
Remove Page Numbers
1

FORMAT PAGE NUMBERS
Page Number →
Format Page Numbers
Page Number Format: 1, 2, 3, ...
Include chapter number
Chapter starts with: (optional)
Use separator: (hyphen)
Examples: 1-1, 3-4
Page numbering: Continue from previous section Start at: 1
OK Cancel
Use this when a new section needs a different format or starting number.

THE LINK TO PREVIOUS
Breaks the connection so this section can be different.
☐ Different First Page
☐ Different Odd & Even Pages
☒ Link to Previous
Header & Footer

SHOW SECTION BREAKS
Home tab → Show/Hide ¶
Paragraph mark
--- Page break
--- Section break (Next Page)
--- Section break (Continuous)

CURT'S QUICK TIP
When numbering goes wrong, stop and check these six things before making more changes.
1 Display the section breaks.
2 Identify the section.
3 Opeck Different First Page and Different Odd & Even Pages.
6 Check Format Page Numbers.

HEADERS, FOOTERS, PAGE NUMBERS—THE BIG PICTURE

FEATURE	PURPOSE	WHERE TO FIND IT	KEY POINT
Header	Repeating information at the top of pages.	Insert → Header	Top area. Separate for each section.
Footer	Repeating information at the bottom of pages.	Insert → Footer	Bottom area. Separate for each section.
Page Number	Automatically numbers pages.	Insert → Page Number	It's a field—never type numbers!
Section Break	Creates a new section with different rules.	Layout → Breaks → Next Page	Use only when rules need to change.

REMEMBER
Create the section. Unlink if needed. Then format the header, footer, and page numbers.

Headers, Footers, and Page Numbers in Word

Untangling One of Word's Most Confusing Features

By Curtis Jerry Smothers

Why This Gets So Confusing

Headers, footers, and page numbers seem simple until you try to make them behave differently in different parts of a document. Perhaps you want no page number on the title page, Roman numerals in the preliminary pages, ordinary numbers beginning with Chapter One, and chapter titles across the top of later pages. That is usually when Word begins tying otherwise sensible users into knots.

The confusion comes from treating three related but separate features as though they were the same thing. A **header** is the area near the top of a page. A **footer** is the area near the bottom. A **page number** is a field that may be placed in either area—or elsewhere on the page. Headers and footers are containers; page numbers are items that can live inside them.

Once that distinction is clear, the rest becomes much easier.

What Belongs in a Header or Footer?

Headers and footers hold information that repeats from page to page. A header might contain the document title, chapter name, author, company name, or date. A footer might contain a page number, copyright notice, filename, confidentiality warning, or “Page 3 of 12.”

To begin working in either area, double-click near the top or bottom margin of the page. Word opens the **Header & Footer** tab and temporarily fades the main document text. When you finish, click **Close Header and Footer**, press **Esc**, or double-click in the body of the document.

Where to find it: Insert → Header or Footer.

Page Numbers Are Fields, Not Typed Text

One of the most important rules in Word is this:

Never type page numbers manually.

When you insert a page number properly, Word places a special field in the document. That field automatically changes from page to page and adjusts whenever text is added, deleted, or moved. Word can position page numbers in a header, footer, page margin, or current cursor location.

Where to find it: Insert → Page Number.

You can then choose a position and style, such as top of page, bottom of page, left, center, or right.

Removing the Number from the First Page

Title pages usually do not display a page number, even though they may still count as the first page of the document. The simplest way to hide it is to activate **Different First Page**.

Double-click the header or footer on the first page, then select **Different First Page** on the Header & Footer tab. Word creates a separate first-page header and footer, allowing you to remove the number from that page without affecting the pages that follow. This setting can also be applied to the first page of any later section, not merely the opening page of the document.

Deleting the first page number without selecting **Different First Page** may remove numbering from every page connected to that header or footer. That is one of the traps that causes so much frustration.

Section Breaks Control the Rules

A **page break** merely forces the following text onto a new page. A **section break** creates a new portion of the document that may follow different formatting rules.

This is the key to controlling page numbering.

Suppose your document contains:

- A title page with no visible number
- A preface numbered i, ii, iii
- A main text beginning with page 1
- Appendices using a different header

Each portion needs its own section because each follows different rules. Word offers several kinds of section breaks, including **Next Page**, **Continuous**, **Even Page**, and **Odd Page**. For most page-numbering changes, **Next Page** is the appropriate choice.

Where to find it: Layout → Breaks → Section Breaks → Next Page.

The Link to Previous Trap

When you create a new section, Word normally connects its header and footer to those in the previous section. This connection is called **Link to Previous**.

That default behavior is convenient when you want the same header or footer throughout the document. It becomes a nuisance when the new section needs something different. If you change the page number or delete the header while the sections remain linked, Word may make the same change in the previous section.

To create an independent header or footer, open it in the new section and turn off **Link to Previous**. Headers and footers must be unlinked separately because each is its own area.

Where to find it: Double-click the header or footer in the new section, then choose **Header & Footer** → **Link to Previous** to turn it off.

This little button is responsible for a large share of Word's page-numbering misery.

Starting Page Numbers Over

After creating and unlinking a new section, you can decide whether its numbering should continue from the previous section or begin again.

For example, the preliminary pages of a book might use lowercase Roman numerals:

i, ii, iii, iv

The first chapter may then begin with:

I, 2, 3, 4

To change the number format or starting number, open the header or footer in the new section and choose:

Page Number → Format Page Numbers

Select the desired numbering style, then choose **Start at** and enter the opening number. Word supports ordinary Arabic numerals, Roman numerals, letters, and other format.

A Practical Book Setup

Here is a common arrangement for a report, memoir, or book:

Section 1: Title Page

The title page has no visible page number. Select **Different First Page** and leave the first-page header and footer blank.

Section 2: Front Matter

Insert a **Next Page Section Break** after the title page. Use Roman numerals for the dedication, acknowledgments, preface, and Table of Contents.

Section 3: Main Text

Insert another **Next Page Section Break** before Chapter One. Turn off **Link to Previous**, change the format to ordinary numerals, and choose **Start at 1**.

Later Sections

Create additional section breaks only when the formatting must change—for example, when appendices need different headings or a landscape page requires a different layout.

The important point is that you should not create a new section for every page. Create one only when the rules change.

Different Odd and Even Pages

Books often place the book or chapter title on one side and the author's name or section title on the other. Word handles this with **Different Odd & Even Pages**.

Once selected, odd-numbered pages receive one header or footer and even-numbered pages receive another. This allows information and page numbers to appear toward the outside edges of facing pages.

Where to find it: Double-click the header or footer, then choose **Header & Footer** → **Different Odd & Even Pages**.

Remember that the odd-page header, even-page header, first-page header, and their matching footers are separate areas. Changing one does not necessarily change the others.

Why Deleting a Page Number Can Backfire

Users sometimes click a page number and press **Delete**, expecting it to disappear from one page. Instead, it vanishes from an entire section—or the whole document.

That happens because the number is part of a repeating header or footer. Unless that page belongs to a separate section or uses **Different First Page**, it shares the same header or footer as neighboring pages.

Before deleting anything, ask:

- Is this page in its own section?
- Is **Different First Page** selected?
- Is the new section still linked to the previous one?
- Am I editing the header, the footer, or the page-number field itself?

Those questions usually reveal why Word is behaving unexpectedly.

Display the Hidden Section Breaks

Section breaks are invisible during ordinary editing, which makes troubleshooting difficult. Turn on **Show/Hide ¶** to reveal paragraph marks, page breaks, and section breaks.

Where to find it: **Home** → **Show/Hide ¶**.

Once the break is visible, you can confirm where each section begins and determine whether an unwanted break is causing the problem. Be cautious when deleting section breaks because removing one can also remove the formatting rules attached to the section that follows.

Curt's Quick Tip

When page numbering goes wrong, do not keep clicking buttons and hoping for the best. Stop and inspect the document in this order:

1. Display the section breaks.

2. Identify which section contains the problem.
3. Open that section's header or footer.
4. Check **Link to Previous**.
5. Check **Different First Page** and **Different Odd & Even Pages**.
6. Open **Format Page Numbers** and inspect the numbering format and starting value.

Most page-numbering problems are caused by one of those settings.

Headers and Footers Are Independent

One final source of confusion deserves emphasis: the header and footer are independent of each other. Turning off **Link to Previous** in the header does not necessarily unlink the footer. Likewise, placing a page number in the footer has no effect on text in the header.

Think of every section as potentially having six separate containers:

- First-page header
- First-page footer
- Odd-page header
- Odd-page footer
- Even-page header
- Even-page footer

You will not always use all six, but understanding that they can exist explains why Word sometimes seems to ignore a change made elsewhere.

Bringing Order to the Confusion

Headers, footers, and page numbers become manageable once you understand the hierarchy. Page numbers live inside headers or footers. Headers and footers belong to sections. Sections may be linked to—or independent from—the sections before them.

The safest sequence is therefore:

Create the section. Unlink it when necessary. Then format its header, footer, and page numbering.

Follow that order, and even a complex document with title pages, Roman numerals, chapter headings, alternating odd-and-even headers, and restarted page numbers becomes far less mysterious. Word is not deliberately trying to confuse you. It is simply following rules that are mostly invisible until you learn where to look.