# Create Structured Documents using MS Word

Why does structure matter?

A correctly structured document is one which uses functional classes (ie: headings, tables, lists) rather than just visual formatting to provide the document with a 'logical structure'.

Many people will simply enlarge and embolden heading text rather than applying a Heading class. This practice is fine for documents which will only ever be received in print (hardcopy). However, the volume of documents now stored and distributed electronically has resulted in a greater need for documents to be structurally meaningful so that they are 'machine-readable' – in other words, so that the structure can be determined for the purposes of automated interpretation such as indexing, searching, format converting and reading (in the case of screen readers and assistive technologies for users with visual impairments).

Creating a structured word processed document facilitates automated conversion to other digital formats (for example, to create usable and accessible PDFs (Portable Document Format) or HTML (Hypertext Mark-up Language) documents – *HTML is a structural mark-up language using comparable functional classes*).

An example of a simple document structure might be as follows:

Heading 1

Heading 2

Body Text

Heading 2

Body Text

Heading 3

Body Text
* List
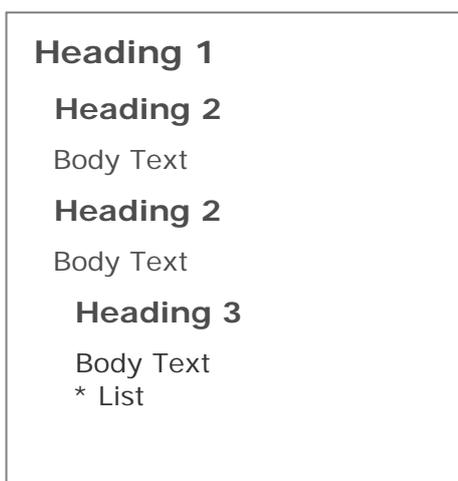
Applying structure in MS Word

The benefits of correctly structuring your documents in Word include:

- Consistency of structure and form - *every time you apply a particular class, for example 'Heading 2', it will be formatted in the same way as all other identical classes throughout the document.*
- Ease of reformatting – *because there is an element of separating structure and style, you can apply changes of style to particular classes for use throughout the document without changing every instance.*
- Use the Document Map (View > Document Map) feature and automatically generate an accurate Table of Contents (Insert > Reference > Index and Tables… > Table of Content).
- Convert to other formats such as HTML, PDF and SGML.

While MS Word does not offer the complexity and richness of structure as something like HTML, it does offer a basis to create much more usable and accessible documents than many people commonly produce through incorrect use of the tool.
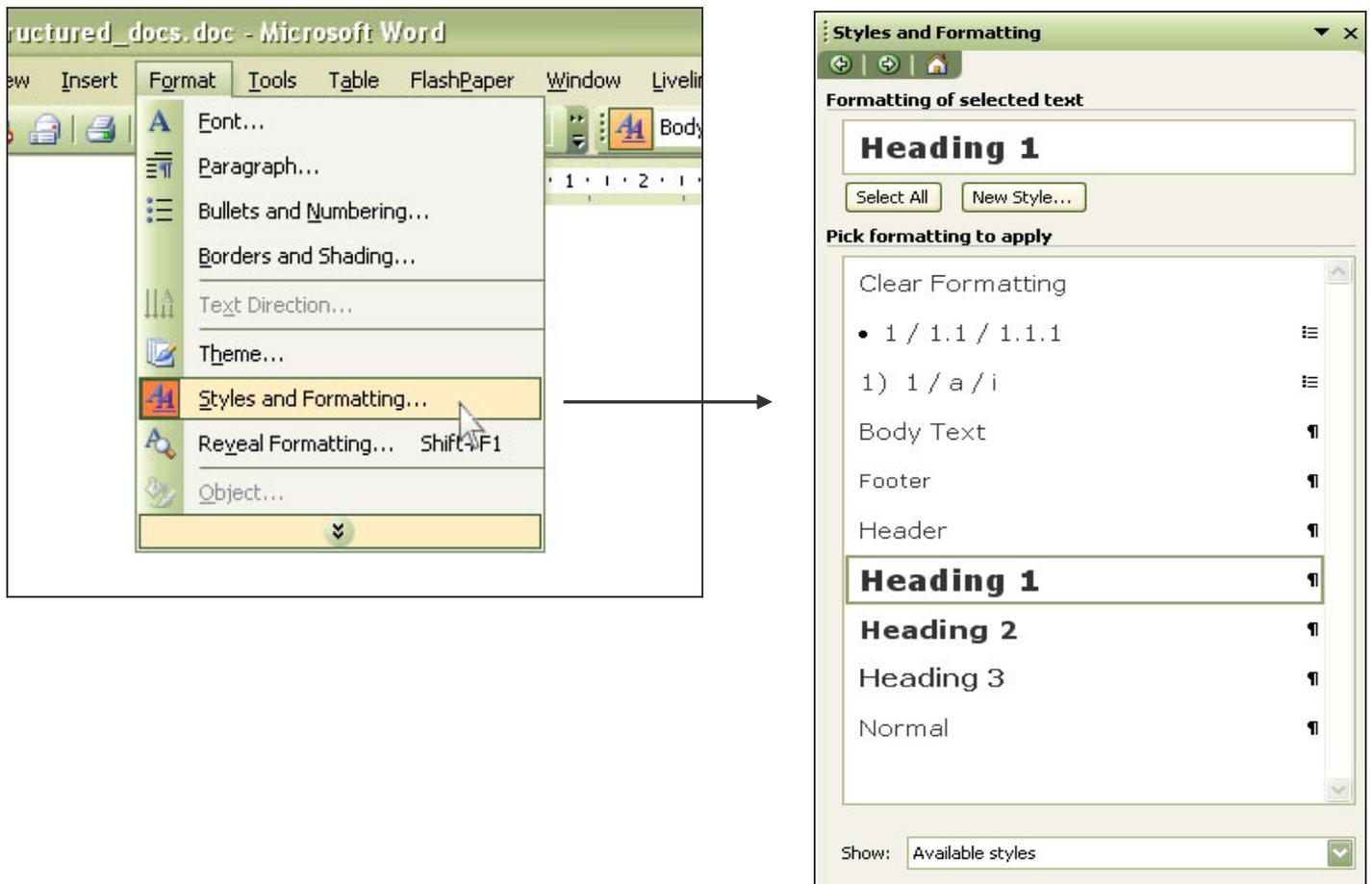
Applying structure

Two ways of attaching a structural class in Word:

1) Select the class directly from the 'styles and formatting' drop-down menu in your toolbar (with the cursor positioned within the chosen section of text on the page):
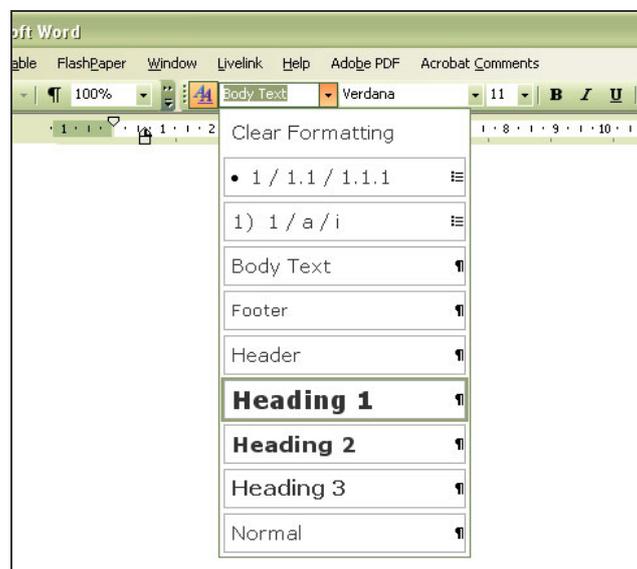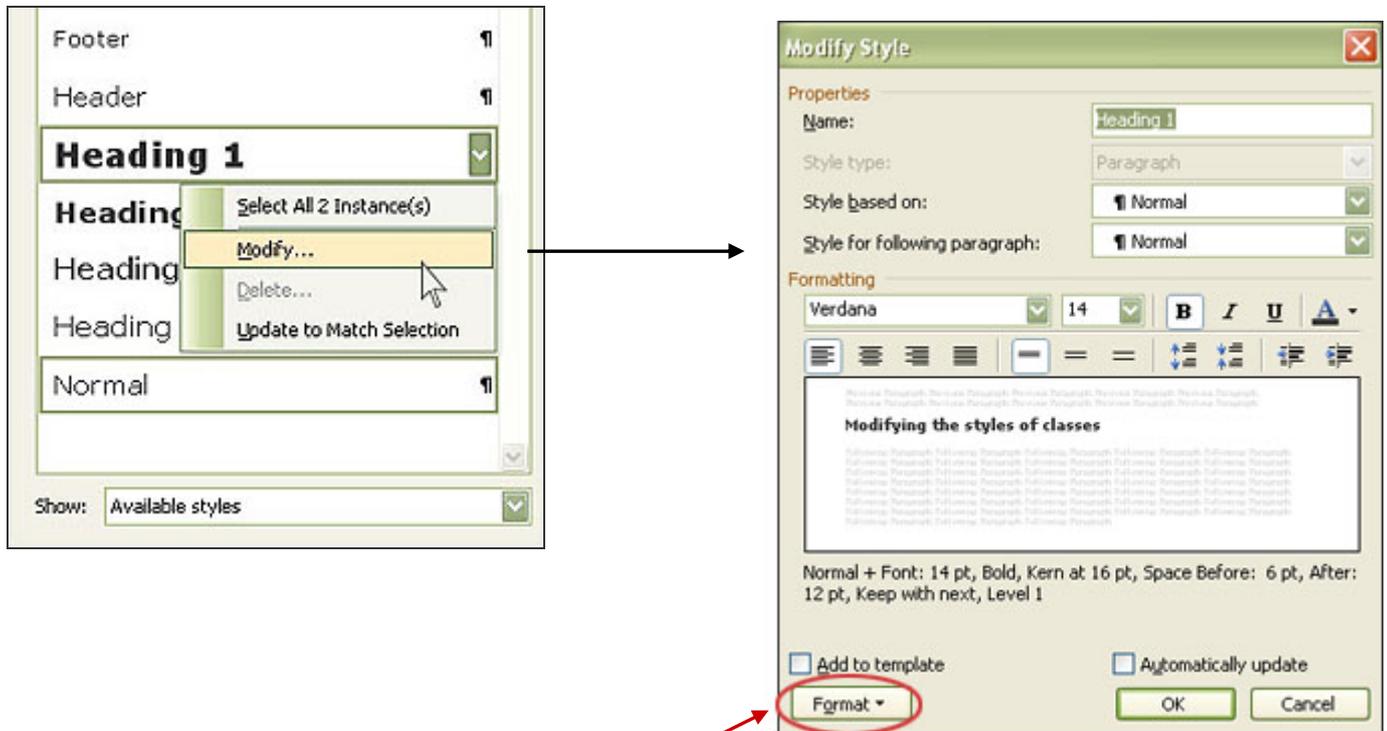
1) Reveal the Styles and Formatting palette/menu (Format > Styles and Formatting...):

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Modifying the styles of classes

You may not like the default styling of the classes. In this case you can right-click your mouse (Windows users) and select 'Modify..' to alter the styling of a particular class:

Further formatting options available such as line spacing etc.