DO I NEED ONE OR TWO SPACES AFTER A PERIOD?

We live in a world in which space is increasingly becoming a premium commodity both virtually and literally. Even on the page upon which you now gaze, economy takes hold. Remember in the “good old days” we practiced double-spacing after a sentence ending punctuation? The world has evolved and so have best practices of writing, editing, and format.

If you are seasoned enough to remember landline phones, VCR’s and even “ice boxes,” you also remember the more innocent time of the double-spaced end-of-sentence ritual. For those of you that are authors, editors, or anyone that might appreciate a little writing help, here’s a brief but meaningful explanation: This punctuation practice stems from the days when type was set by hand. Because of the delicate and artisanal nature of the process, uniformity of spacing was not a given. The typesetter found challenges because of varied widths of individual letters and for clarity and pause, the double-space after the sentence ending punctuation was employed to aid in emphasizing and clarifying the complete thought. The practice was phased out as technology took hold in our daily lives. Although some might endorse maintaining the double-space practice when using a traditional typewriter (as that double space paid a small homage to the typesetter’s craft), now that most communication is done on an electronic keyboard such as that found on a computer, tablet, or Smartphone, the practice has become obsolete. Contemporary font selections available for word processing compensate for the need to add pause at the end of the sentence. According to the Chicago Manual of Style, in the first half of the twentieth century it was common practice to use the double space when typing and the format was taught to maintain that extra space up to around the mid twentieth century.

Space, as we know, is a state of mind but it is not a requirement in the modern world of sentence structure. And although, as we write, we have a knee-jerk compulsion to double tap that space bar each time we come to a full stop, we too, will be conscious of honoring best practices of proper writing format!